

Editorial

‘The Order of Service’

‘What an odd subject for the editorial of a journal of practical theology!’ thinks someone as they read the title ‘The Order of Service’.

But there are several reasons why I have chosen to reflect on this particular topic. One is that there is among many younger ministers a restless irritation with the old way of doing things. It is as if the way services were conducted three decades ago is now unacceptable to a 21st century congregation because it is bound to be mind-numbingly boring. I have heard some contemptuously referring to the ‘hymn-prayer sandwich’!

Another reason for turning over some thoughts on this subject is that there appears to be an unspoken assumption going around that public worship is there to be experimented with— ‘a new order must be better than the old’, seems to be the reasoning, and so unsuspecting congregations are exposed to services in which there is no logical order, far

less any underlying theological framework.

A further reason for this editorial is that while there was an article in an earlier journal on the major ‘ingredients’ of Divine Service as taught in Scripture,¹ many readers appear neither to have noticed nor understood the relevance of what the Bible teaches, far less acknowledged its authority on this subject. Public worship apparently remains an area in which the minister can experiment to his heart’s content without bothering about those ordination vows which affirmed Scripture as the supreme source of authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

Divine Service

The words ‘Public Worship’ are an appropriate description of the gathering together of the Lord’s people on the Lord’s Day; nevertheless I believe the old-fashioned phrase ‘Divine Service’ has much to commend it. My reasoning is simple: the Bible itself uses the word

Contents

- 1 Editorial
- 4 Marching to Immanuel’s Land: Samuel Rutherford
William Philip
- 11 Ministry in the New Millennium (Part 2)
Stafford Carson
- 14 Evangelism: A Priority for the New Millennium
Howard Marshall
- 19 Sursum Corda!
James S Stewart
- 24 Pros and Cons of Every Member Ministry
Norman Maciver
- 29 ..through the foolishness of preaching..
David Randall
- 35 Ann Allen meets David Searle
- 38 Book Reviews

'service' for all that goes on when Christians meet together to offer their praise and worship to God. While such assemblies clearly have a 'horizontal' dimension in that we meet for fellowship and mutual encouragement, our primary focus is 'vertical' in that God is the subject and we are merely the object. We are at worship because *God* has taken the initiative, because *he* invites us and because as our Redeemer and Lord he comes to meet with us.

'matey' best encourages fellowship and that 'transcendence' will fall into place some time later in the proceedings. But I can never quite get out of my mind that the Lord taught us in our approach to God to hold both the divine intimacy and the divine transcendent otherness together in the most delicate of balances: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. The Father is in the heavens, what could be more transcendent than that? And his name is to be hal-

tion displays, the date and time of a Korean Choir in a neighbouring church and the like. I suppose the idea is to get all these things out of the way right at the beginning so that we can then get on with worship undistracted by such mundane details. But is that the right way to open a service? I suggest not.

After standing in the pulpit for three decades each Sunday and now finding myself in the pew of many different churches as I travel around and at the mercy of the one leading, I find myself feeling like a tired and thirsty traveller passing through the wilderness of this world. As the service begins, my eyes are looking far beyond the one standing at the front — I am searching for a sight of the Risen Lord and listening for his voice. I am longing for a cup of cool water to quench my thirst. Therefore when a rambling list of miscellaneous activities is rehearsed in my ears, the sense of disappointment is acute. 'Point me to my Saviour!' I cry in my heart.

Someone may object that the intimations have to find their slot somewhere in the order of service and what better place than to clear them out of the way at the start. But are they not better placed immediately before the intercessory prayer so that the 'family matters' they allude to can be gathered up into the congregation's prayers for God's blessing on the life and work of the fellowship? (The valuable time intimations/notices occupy can be minimised by having them on a printed sheet issued to people as they enter.)

Praise Him!

Just as OT worshippers had to pass through the encampment of Judah ('Judah' means 'praise') to enter the Tent of Meeting, so we too must 'enter his gates with praise'. The choice of opening praise in some services I have attended over recent years has been unexpected to say the least. I recall one service (not in Scotland) where the minister was preaching on a section of Psalm 119. He therefore chose every item of praise on the theme of studying the Bible. One could understand the charge of bibliolatry being brought against him! There certainly was no outward, upward

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I am not advocating being so pedantic as to suggest we always announce that 'divine service next Lord's Day will be at 11am' or whatever. Rather am I saying that to understand our assemblies as 'divine services' is to begin with the right perspective. It is to recognise meetings of believers must be theocentric and not anthropocentric (which some gatherings of Christians have undoubtedly become). It is to establish the biblical priority before ever a word is spoken.

Hello — I can't hear you!

I confess to finding myself dismayed when ministers stand up and begin the worship of God by saying 'Hello!' Quite how such an introduction can be appropriate for the approach to the awesome presence of the Almighty I fail to understand. Worse still is the almost unbelievable practice of some who have trained their congregation to answer back in chorus, 'Hello!' but who — when the congregational response is lacking in stentorian volume — shout a second time, 'Hello! I can't hear you!' thus evoking a shout in reply 'Helloooooo!' How anthropocentric can Christian gatherings become!

I am perfectly well aware that the intention of those who open their services in this way is to try and produce a sense of togetherness. They are of the opinion that 'imminence' bordering on the

lowed — does that not suggest an approach to him which has no place for 'Hello! ...I can't hear you!'

Let us worship God

No doubt the intention of those who want to begin the service by greeting their people is a worthy one. However, I would suggest that a better and more decorous opening greeting would be, 'Good morning! We (not I, for the minister is speaking as the mouthpiece of the fellowship) welcome you to our service today, especially any who may be visitors. It's good to have you with us and our prayer is that God will bless you as you share in our worship', or something similar, not necessarily as conventional as that suggestion. Then should come at once a call to worship God, preferably using some words of Scripture such as a Psalm. This is not to suggest that the opening greeting be stiff, formal and unarresting. It is important for the opening words to establish a rapport with the congregation and yet, at the same time, impart a sense of the purpose of the gathering.

However, in fewer and fewer congregations does that call to worship God come in the opening moments of the service. First we are directed to the Intimations or Notices — a list of congregational events such as daffodil teas, Scout jumble sales, Guild cake decora-

look to the Lord, no lifting of our hearts to adore our God.

Within the past few months I have attended services (not in Edinburgh) where the opening singing was introspective 'navel gazing'. One only has to be subjected to such inappropriate 'starters' to realise very quickly that the heart pants after the living God who is not to be found in the inner recesses of a fallen human mind! My plea therefore is that in the opening act of worship the Lord's people always be directed to the greatness of the God of all grace!

Absolution

I have sometimes wondered exactly what goes on in Practical Theology classes nowadays, as fresh young ministers straight from college, in their opening prayer launch straight into the needs of the disadvantaged people of the Third World. If these aspiring ministers-to-be haven't had the wit to pick up somewhere along the line that God is to be approached with adoration followed by confession, one wonders what hope there is for them grasping some of the more subtle points of theology!

What I find lacking in our contemporary reformed practice is absolution — the clear assurance given by the minister as he prays that God does forgive those who truly turn to him in repentance and faith. Have I some deep-seated psychological problem that I long to hear in that opening prayer that Jesus has paid all my debts to God, that I am washed and clean and beloved by my Father? Had the Lord not commanded his disciples to pronounce absolution, I might suspect I did have a problem. But the fact is that he did authorise them to bring that glorious assurance to his people. Ministers, we need it again and again and again! We are sinners and we come to seek God because in Christ he is our Saviour. Tell us that, clearly, eloquently, strongly until we want to rise up and cry, 'Hallelujah! He has carried my sins away and remembers them no more!'

'Tell me the story often, for I forget so soon...'

'Hear the word of God!'

'Pay attention to reading,' wrote the

apostle to the young man Timothy. I believe I am right when I say that he meant something like, 'Be an excellent communicator of the word of God when you read it publicly.' In other words, make the book live — read it with expression, with pathos, with emotion.

I understand that past great masters of the pulpit had Bibles which were heavily marked to guide them in their public reading during divine service. They had spent time alone in the sanc-

have forced themselves upon him in the public reading of Scripture in a way that has not happened in his own private and devotional study.²

Our prayers

I have heard Spurgeon quoted as saying that if we prepare what we say to people about God (the sermon), how much more should we prepare what we say to God on behalf of the people. 'On behalf of the people' — how important

I find myself feeling like a tired and thirsty traveller passing through the wilderness of this world

tuary practising their reading of the Book. Of course, this was in the days of the one-man ministry. Today, many churches will use a fairly large number of men and women for Scripture reading and that can be good. But it does not take from the minister the responsibility of ensuring that those who read Scripture lessons do so well. The word should be read slowly, clearly, distinctly and above all with understanding.

In my former congregation, I insisted readers come early so I (or some one else) could first hear them and make helpful comments on how to communicate more effectively. I also had brief guide-lines issued to all readers. Those who might object to any help of this nature being offered simply fail to realise the importance of the service they are being asked to give. I can honestly say I never had any such objections; indeed, my emphasis on the reading being done well only served to increase the awareness of the importance and privilege of sharing in the service in this way.

My good friend Ronnie Wallace has pointed out that 'the sympathetic and intelligent reading of the Scriptures by the ordinary member of the church who has an aptitude for such a task can by itself become an illuminating and powerful means of their interpretation.' He goes on to say that he has often been arrested by the ways phrases or sentences

that is. The one leading prayers is not in his own private room engaging in personal prayer with the Lord. He is speaking on behalf of all those gathered.

I'm not at all sure about intercessory prayers coming after the sermon. The offering after the sermon, yes, but after the offering I think most worshippers want to join in the final act of praise which ought to gather up the challenges and vision of the sermon into words of response which enable the congregation to offer to God their commitment and rededication.

Conclusion

There should be a warm and enthusiastic welcome offered as people enter church and are shown to their seats. Yet I prefer the helpful, extended chat, mutual caring and catching up on family news by worshippers to come after the benediction rather than before the service begins. I acknowledge it can take years of patient education of a congregation by the minister to achieve the understanding that prior to the call to worship, the people of God help those who will take part by being in prayer and meditation on the word. Once the service has concluded, the vital horizontal dimension of worship comes into its own, based as it then is on the praise of God and the teaching of the Scriptures.

I recall hearing of an incident in

which two ladies sitting near the front of the church were engaging in trivial conversation prior to the service beginning. The organist was irritated by their empty chatter and so to drown it out he increased the volume of his playing. The two women responded by increasing the volume of their gossip, and so it went on until the organ was playing at full blast. Suddenly the voluntary ended and the organ fell silent, at which point one of the women was heard across the church shouting, 'I fry mine in butter!'

We may smile but there are some vital theological issues involved in this final point. The understanding of worship in some recent publications on the subject tends to play down the transcendent, vertical dimension and emphasise the horizontal human dimension of fellowship. I fail to see how the colossal weight of evidence in both Old and New Testaments for a balance of both dimensions can be so easily discarded. Oh for a greater God-consciousness in our congregational gatherings! We need an order of service and a conduct of the worship of God which teaches our people we are engaged in divine service when we come together. We need a biblical blending of the transcendent and the imminent. We need engagement with a God who is One in Three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

May our orders of service honour him and build up his people for their blessing and his glory!

- 1 See Rutherford Journal of Church & Ministry, Vol. 5.2 article on 'Worship in Exodus'
- 2 Ronald S. Wallace, *On the Interpretation and Use of the Bible* (SAP, Edinburgh 1999), p.62

Marching to

Samuel Rutherford
1600-61

(For the 400th anniversary of his birth)

However quietly the calendar rolled over the century in the tranquillity of the pleasant borders countryside, already ominous clouds were gathering over the land of Scotland in the year 1600, clouds of conflict that would overshadow the nation and its church until the very last decade of the 17th century. It was in that year, exactly 400 years ago, that Samuel Rutherford was born in Nisbet near Jedburgh, and little could he or his family have known just how much his life, and his life's work, would be shaped and dictated by the momentous events of State that occurred in the few years surrounding his birth. For less than 40 years after the establishment of the Reformation in Scotland in 1560, and following the apparently wholehearted endorsement of the presbyterian Kirk by King James VI in the Act of 1592,¹ by 1596 the harmonious relations between Kirk and King had badly soured, and the tide had turned decisively against the cause of a self-governing presbyterian established church in Scotland.

Uncontrollable ministers

James realised his conception of the divine right of kings could not co-exist with such a church full of uncontrollable ministers who, like Elijah with Ahab, felt called to upbraid and criticise him publicly when his policies fell short of their expectation.² It became increas-

ingly clear that the only way he could have the kind of sovereignty he was determined to have would be to re-introduce bishops over whom he could exert control, and he began a quest to bring the church into line. By 1603 he had been crowned King of England, and found there a church whose clergy 'surrounded him with a nauseating flattery',³ no doubt cementing his belief that the episcopal system was far more congenial to his purposes, and its 'benefits' must certainly be extended to his northern kingdom.

So began a long and often violent struggle where first James, then his son Charles I and grandson Charles II fought bitterly for control of both church and state in Scotland (and the rest of the British Isles) in one of the most turbulent periods in the nation's history. And through these long years, amid the vicissitudes of such church/state entanglements, many brave and principled churchmen sought to defend their Reformation faith and their national church against the both the onslaught of doctrinal error and the repression of kings, parliaments and prelacy.⁴ It was in such times that Samuel Rutherford lived.

A moving and affectionate preacher

After schooling in Jedburgh, Rutherford gained the MA from Edinburgh Uni-

Immanuel's Land

William JU Philip, Proclamation Trust

versity in 1621. He was an excellent classicist³ and taught there for a time as Professor of Humanity before studying theology and taking up the parish of Anwoth, Galloway, in 1627. A warm-hearted and greatly loved pastor, Rutherford was perhaps more content during this time than at any other in his life, despite being no stranger to personal heartache and grief — he was bereaved of his wife and both of his children in his early years of ministry there. Though somewhat lacking in natural eloquence, he was nevertheless known as 'one of the most moving and affectionate preachers of his time'⁶ who loved, and lived for, his congregation.

His pastoral devotion was legendary, the folk boasting of their minister that 'he is always praying, always preaching, always visiting the sick, always catechising, always writing and studying', and indeed his prodigious pattern of ministry seems almost incredible to the modern reader. Yet it does underline that for Rutherford being a true pastor and preacher of Christ was the highest calling of all, and it was his sincere desire for the spiritual wellbeing of the ordinary congregations of God's people throughout the land that was to fuel every aspect of his multifarious contribution to the world of theology, church government and political theory.

Militant Churchman

Despite his devotion to the people of Anwoth, Rutherford's heart and mind were nevertheless fully engaged with the great issues of the day concerning church and nation. As a convinced presbyterian and strong defender of the Reformed faith, his persistent nonconformity to the episcopalian patterns of worship, as demanded by James VI's Articles of Perth,⁷ brought him into sharp conflict with the prevailing establishment powers. He was charged with nonconformity in 1630, but escaped punishment.

Archbishop attacked

However, the last straw for the bishops was his publication of a theological work in 1636⁸ in which he vigorously assailed Arminianism, the theological system opposed to the Reformation doctrine of sovereign, unconditional grace of God at work in Christ for the salvation of sinners. This was (rightly) construed as an attack on William Laud, Charles I's spiritual advisor and Archbishop of Canterbury, and the doctrine he was promulgating in Scotland in an effort to dominate the church by the crown and restore blanket Anglo-Catholicism to the whole realm. In July 1636 Rutherford was deposed from Anwoth by the Court of High Commission in Edinburgh, barred from preaching and exiled to Aberdeen, the chief strong-

hold of episcopacy and Arminianism, where he was forced to stay for 18 months.

However, following the rebellion of the Scots in favour of the National Covenant of 1638, the situation was reversed and Rutherford returned to Anwoth. But his singular qualities were needed by the wider church, and very quickly he found himself appointed Professor of Divinity in St Andrews by the same Glasgow General Assembly of 1638 that repealed the hated Articles of Perth. He left Anwoth for this post very reluctantly, and only with the proviso that he be allowed to preach regularly in the city pulpit in St Andrew's. (He lamented the 'dumb sabbaths' he had been forced to spend in Aberdeen, and could not bear the thought of further 'exile' away from a real pulpit ministry.) In 1640 he married his second wife who bore them seven children, though tragically only one of them outlived him).

Commissioner to Westminster

In 1643 he was again prevailed upon by the wider church. By now there was civil war in England, and the Scots joined with the English Parliamentarians under the Solemn League and Covenant⁹ sending their army against the king. In the midst of all this, Rutherford was dispatched to London as one of eight Scots Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly, a commission already set up by

the now pro-presbyterian English Parliament to seek at last to reform properly the doctrine, worship and government of the Church of England in a manner 'most agreeable to God's holy word and most apt to procure and preserve the peace of the church at home, and nearer agreement with the Church of Scotland and other Reformed churches abroad.'¹⁰

Despite ill health and the grief of further family bereavements at home, his four years of London 'exile' were extraordinarily productive. He wrote several major works on covenant theology and church polity¹¹ as well as his

*good pastors ensure
the people are fed and
spiritual nourishment
is the input of God's
truth*

famous treatise on civil government and the limitations of monarchy, *Lex Rex* (1644).¹² He played a prominent part in the theological debates of the Assembly, and with his fellow Scots undoubtedly exerted a disproportionate influence on proceedings by virtue of the fact they already had experience of a working presbyterian system, whereas this was generally unknown in England.

Burning desire

In 1647 he returned to St Andrews, and by 1651 was Rector of the University. The reputation of his writings throughout the Reformed world earned him invitations to prestigious professorships in Europe, but he determined to remain in Scotland, where his burning desire for the good of Christ's church meant he was never far from controversy.

He was an unyielding Protester against what he saw as naive resolutions of Parliament in 1650 to rehabilitate royalists who had formerly sided with Charles I against the Covenanters, all on the basis that Charles II had subscribed to the covenants when he was proclaimed king in Scotland in 1650 and promised (under duress) to protect presbyterianism.¹³

Killing times

His scepticism was amply justified because following the full restoration of the monarchy in 1660 Parliament passed the Act Recissory reversing all legislation of the Covenanters' period, and moves began to re-establish episcopacy. In the years of persecution that followed, hundreds of ministers were deposed, churches closed, and the death penalty imposed on field preachers at the resulting open air 'conventicle' gatherings of the faithful and on the Covenanters who attended them. By the time the Glorious Revolution of 1688 put an end to the terrible 'killing times' many thousands of Covenanters had been butchered at the hands of Royalist troops under the command of men like John Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee.¹⁴

Spared martyrdom

In March 1661, the same month the Act Recissory was passed, *Lex Rex* was burned by the public hangman both in Edinburgh and outside Rutherford's college in St Andrews, and he was summoned to answer the charge of treason before Parliament. But by now Rutherford was already dying, and replied that he had already got a summons before a superior judge and judicatory, and sent the famous message 'I be'ove to answer to my first summons, and ere your day come, I will be where few kings and great folks come.' On 30th March 1661 he answered that first summons, and so was spared inevitable martyrdom.

Political Theorist and Constitutional Architect

Rutherford ranks among Scotland's greatest churchmen and thinkers, with an abiding legacy that has not only shaped much of the theology and ecclesiastical government in Reformed churches worldwide, but has been notably influential in the development of the major western political democracies.

Man of extremes

He was in many ways a man of extremes, the warm and emotional expansiveness

of his devotional writings contrasting sharply with the narrow and unyielding juridical nature of his more polemic works, but these latter need to be viewed in the context of the tumultuous times he lived in, where fierce battles were being waged for the survival of the Reformation Faith.

His insistence on presbyterian church government and contempt for religious toleration of independency¹⁵ earned him the ire of those who, like Cromwell, were fierce independents and hated presbyterians. For the poet Milton 'new Presbyter [was] but old priest writ large', and Rutherford was one of the odious 'new enforcers of conscience under the Long Parliament'. Yet at the same time it was Rutherford who championed the indispensable principles of liberty which came to undergird what we now take for granted as modern liberal democracy.

Accursed power

Following in the path of previous Reformed writings,¹⁶ *Lex Rex* was by far the most mature and influential exposition of Calvinist political thought. Against the idea of the divine right of kings and limitless royal sovereignty, Rutherford asserted the supremacy of the rule of law, and declared that 'an absolute and unlimited monarchy is not only not the best form of government, but it is the worst' because 'omnipotency in one that can sin is an accursed power'. 'An absolute monarch is, *actu promo*, a sleeping lion, and a tyrant is a waking and devouring lion, and they differ in accidents only.' Therefore, power is conferred only by popular consent, there being 'no title on earth now to tie crowns to families, to persons, but only the suffrages of the people'.¹⁷ It is easy to see why *Lex Rex* was hardly popular with kings and nobility!¹⁸

In fact what he was advocating was not republicanism, nor even full democracy with universal suffrage in the modern sense, but rather 'a limited and mixed monarchy' of delegated power, with the benefit of a monarch's 'glory, order and unity' the aristocracy's 'counsel, stability and strength' and 'from the influence of the commons ... liberty,

privileges, promptitude of obedience'.

Power to dethrone

But, and here was the rapier edge for his own times — because a lawful king is made only by God and 'by the action of the people as his instrument', so the people have not only a right but a duty to resist a tyrant, and have the power, acting as God's instrument, to dethrone an evil regime.

These principles were later taken up by John Locke (1632-1704), and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), and through Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) came to have enormous influence during the American Revolution. Although one commentator remarks of Rutherford's turgid legal prose that 'there is as much emotion in the multiplication table as there is in *Lex Rex*', its seminal nature is beyond dispute. And when amid the dense arguments we come across such resounding statements as 'every man by nature is a free man born' it is easy to see why *Lex Rex* has been described as embracing the core of the American Declaration of Independence.

Theologian of Covenant Grace

Doctrinally, Rutherford was a mature covenant theologian,¹⁹ with a developed theology shaped by both Genevan orthodoxy and the distinctive federal influences of Zacharius Ursinus (1534-83) and Kaspar Olevianus (1536-87) via the Heidelberg School in the Palatinate. Emphasising the Reformation doctrine of salvation by God's free grace, he stressed that the Bible reveals one great story, organised around God's covenants with mankind.

Federal theologian

In his pre-fallen state, a covenant of works (or nature)²⁰ operated, with man promised life by God's gracious condescension, yet clearly threatened with death on disobedience. Adam, as the representative (or federal head) of the whole human race, by his rebellion imputed sin to all mankind. But, 'as in Adam all die' so by means of God's eternal covenant of grace those 'in Christ

shall all be made alive' (1Cor. 15:22). The Old and New Testaments represent two different administrations of this one same covenant of grace, the contrast being not that of law to grace, but of promise to fulfilment.

The biblical story-line weaves the unfolding of this great redemptive history from eternity, through time, to eternity once more, and hence the requirement of faith is the same for all mankind, and justification is always by grace through faith either by prospect, like Abraham, or in retrospect, like Paul.

There were differences of view among federal (covenant) theologians as to points of detail concerning the covenant of grace. Rutherford himself preferred to express God's plan of salvation as a three covenant system,²¹ separating out within it a distinct covenant of redemption which existed in eternity between God the Father and God the Son, whereby Christ promised to stand as substitute for his people, and by his atonement bring them forgiveness and reconciliation. The covenant of grace by contrast is specifically that made between God and the believer in history, offered freely by grace, and responded to in faith.

Supralapsarianism

Others²² felt that this covenant of redemption was part of the one covenant of grace, merely the same transaction considered from the perspective of Father and Son in eternity rather than man in history.²³ (The difference may be more one of clarity of expression and terminology than of substance.) Rutherford was also a supralapsarian with regards to predestination, holding that God first decreed those he would save and then decreed the fall, and the means of salvation through Christ's work, whereas the majority of Calvinists held the infralapsarian view, that only having decreed (or permitted) the fall did God then decree to save his elect.

It is therefore worthy of note that in seeking to express an acceptable generic Reformed theology, The Westminster Confession of Faith, to which Rutherford contributed greatly, is

framed precisely and cautiously in terms of a two covenant, infralapsarian scheme, though in this and other points of debate it is patient of a certain degree of latitude in interpretation. But whatever the intricacies of theological exactitude, there was no mistaking Rutherford's great theological emphasis on covenant grace, hence his epithet, 'Prince of the Covenant.'

Physician of Souls

For the ordinary Christian it is probably Rutherford's contribution to the devotional life of the church that has been significant far beyond his theological writings. It is very likely that he had

*not to give a lead,
gives a lead, for a
church is dynamically
affected by the
approach of its leaders*

the principal hand in drawing up the best known and most widely disseminated work issuing from the Westminster Assembly, the Shorter Catechism. To generations throughout the British Isles and the New World, this was a staple part of Christian education until comparatively recently,²⁴ and countless believing families from all walks of life have taught their children the doctrines of the faith around its questions and answers, beginning with the famous Q1 'What is man's chief end?' Ans: 'To glorify God, and enjoy him forever.'

Gospel balm

Easily the most popular of Rutherford's own works are the Letters written to many of his friends and associates during his Aberdeen exile, first published anonymously as Joshua Redivivus (1664) during the 'killing times' to encourage persecuted Covenanters. Fêted

by CH Spurgeon, the great nineteenth-century preacher, as the 'nearest thing to inspiration which can be found in all the writings of mere men', they became a Christian classic, frequently reprinted and are widely read to the present day.²⁵

Sometimes to the modern reader they seem rather overcharged with emotion, yet they expose the heart of a true man of God who knew what it was to suffer for Christ, and could with real pastoral tenderness administer Gospel balm to suffering fellow pilgrims. 'I desire not to go on the leese side or sunny side of religion, or to put truth betwixt me and a storm: my Saviour did not do so for me, who in his suffering took the windy side of the hill', he wrote to the widow Lady Kenmure in her grief. 'Be content to wade through the waters betwixt you and glory with Him, holding his hand fast, for he keepeth all the fords.' His letters have helped many struggling believers over the centuries to look to the one who keepeth all the fords.

Preacher of Christ

Perhaps the greatest thing about Samuel Rutherford is that despite the dark and difficult days in which he lived, the many controversies he was forced to confront, and even the rifts with close brothers over issues of ecclesiastical politics he endured,²⁶ to the end of his life his first and greatest love remained preaching the grace and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. More than that, he laid great insistence on preaching the person of Christ, preaching Christ; not merely abstract doctrines about Christ, as if (as Bonar puts it) 'mere assent to a proposition could save a soul', but in his preaching holding forth the crucified, risen, glorified and present Saviour himself, in all his attractiveness and winsome grace, clothed with his gospel, and calling the sinner into fellowship deep in his heart of love.

Christ personally present

His preaching proclaimed Christ, showed forth Christ, offered Christ because Christ was personally present in his preaching, speaking to men, and of-

fering himself to them in saving grace. So it was that even in 1650, in the midst of the sore controversy surrounding the Resolutions, an English merchant visiting St Andrews summed up Rutherford's preaching thus: 'he showed me the loveliness of Christ'. Could there be a greater accolade for any preacher?

Even on his deathbed, his words to fellow ministers focused minds and hearts on the person of the Saviour who had been so near a companion throughout his life: 'None is comparable to Him, in heaven or earth. Dear brethren, do all for Him. Pray for Christ. Preach for Christ. Do all for Christ; beware of men pleasing. The Chief Shepherd will shortly appear.' His last words were 'Glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land!'²⁷

Citizen of Immanuel's Land

It is surely this deep heart love for the Saviour, and the true longing for his appearing in glory that best explains the man Samuel Rutherford. For such was the overwhelming greatness of his vision of God and his Kingdom that he could not but view his own earthly life and service, and indeed all affairs of church, nation and world alike, as being irresistibly caught up in the great onward march of the redemptive purposes of God accomplished in the cross of Christ. His was no emasculated 'simple gospel' of mere personal salvation and pietism — everything in time and eternity was overshadowed by the vastness of Christ's atoning work and its boundless implications of grace.

Dawning glory

A true biblical eschatology dominated Rutherford's worldview: all of history was given explanation and meaning only through the gospel, and moreover it was the wonderful certainty of the approaching day of the Christ's glorious appearing that gave perspective to the whole of earthly life. And so for him there could never be a separation of sacred from secular, of doctrine from spirituality or piety from ethics and social responsibility —

for all these were a part of one great whole, life lived in a world moving inexorably onward towards the 'the glory dawning from Immanuel's land'.

No doubt the way Rutherford sometimes expressed his vision seems strange today, for the world he inhabited had much smaller horizons, and the concept of nations being 'covenanted to God' sounds foreign to the contemporary believer in pluralist western society. Yet without doubt there was an integration and wholeness about Rutherford's view of the world and eternity that is strikingly lacking from much of contemporary Christian thinking, where spiritual experience has become almost wholly privatised, relegated to the 'Christian compartment' of busy modern lives, with its parallel culture of 'Christian' music, magazines and even holidays and lonely-hearts clubs — all increasingly divorced from the outside 'secular' world.

The loveliness of Christ

The Church is in desperate need of recovery of much of Rutherford's perspective if it is to avoid drastically shrinking the glorious eternal Gospel of Christ into the man-centred, subjective solution for individual need that it has all too often become in today's evangelicalism. For it is when men have such breadth of vision, such grasp of the sheer magnitude of God's eternal covenant purposes, such confidence in transforming gospel grace, and such deep love and desire for the person of the Saviour himself — that men and women will say of their preaching, as of their lives, 'he showed me the loveliness of Christ!'

Should we not be praying for more men like Samuel Rutherford to come to the aid of the church in Scotland today?

confirmed all privileges, gave liberty in self government, and immunity from unwanted state interference to the established Kirk, and abolished officially all episcopal jurisdictions, translating all such powers to the presbytery.

- 2 A defining issue was James' perceived moderation towards Catholic nobles who had been seen to side with Philip of Spain against Protestant England. He had banished them into exile, but then allowed them to return later, and this caused great anxiety in the fledgling Protestant nation. Following the General Assembly of 1596, where he had been roundly criticised over these matters, James was accosted by Andrew Melville who called him 'God's sillic vassal' and famously declared that there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland. There is Christ Jesus the King, and His kingdom the Kirk, whose subject King James the Sixth is, and of whose kingdom not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member'. Kings (and Prime Ministers) don't like this sort of challenge to their authority!
- 3 Burleigh JHS. *A Church History of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1988) p206.
- 4 A useful summary of this period can be read in Burleigh *ibid.*, pp 188-285, or in pertinent articles in the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (T&TClark, Edinburgh, 1995).
- 5 It was said he could write better in Latin all his days than in either Scots or English.
- 6 Wodrow's Church History, quoted in *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, (Banner of Truth, 1986), p5.
- 7 The 5 Articles were brought before the General Assembly called by James VI at Perth in 1618 on his first visit back to Scotland since taking the English throne. They demanded reversion to procedures abolished following the Reformation, namely 1) kneeling for reception of Communion, 2) sanction for private communion 3) private baptism 4) confirmation of children by bishop and 5) special observation of high and holy days. They were enforced by Parliament in 1621.
- 8 *Exercitationes Apologeticae Pro Divina Gratia* (Amsterdam, 1636).
- 9 This was a religious bond or covenant which went beyond the scope of the National Covenant, and pledged subscribers to the extirpation of episcopacy in Eng-

End Notes

- 1 James' apparent enthusiasm for the Kirk can be seen in his description of it as 'the sincerest Kirk in all the world' and his promise to maintain and protect it 'so long as I brook my life and crown'. The 1592 Act (the so called Charter of Presbytery)

- land and popery in Ireland, with the aim of bringing uniformity in religion and Reformed church government (i.e. presbyterianism) throughout the three kingdoms.
- 10 The irony of course is that the resulting Westminster Confession of Faith, and Larger and Shorter Catechisms and the Directory of Public Worship were never adopted as standards of the Church of England, at least in part because of the immediate ascendancy of Independents under Cromwell and the Commonwealth. The Anglican Church later fell back on the much less comprehensive 39 Articles of 1563, but the Westminster documents became the official standards of the Church of Scotland (and daughter presbyterian churches worldwide).
 - 11 The Due Right of Presbyteries, or A Peaceable Plea for the government of the Church of Scotland (1644); The Tryal and Triumph of Faith (1645); The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication (1646); Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself (1647)
 - 12 Lex, Rex; or the Law and the Prince; a discourse for the just prerogative of king and people (1644)
 - 13 There was continuing controversy until the time of the revolution and re-establishment of presbyterianism in 1690 between the Resolutioners (in favour of re-admitting former Royalists to public life, and, more importantly therefore to the Scots Army) and the Protesters, or Remonstrants, who bitterly opposed this as folly. Essentially, the Resolutioners felt that patriotism necessitated national unity, particularly after Cromwell had routed the Scots at Dunbar in 1650, their army greatly weakened by the purging of former Royalists (Malignants). They feared the English 'Sectaries' under Cromwell as now the greatest threat to the Scot's church and nation. The Protesters (like Rutherford) on the other hand felt the greatest threat remained the combination of Royalists and other enemies of the Covenant, and were (for a time at least) more disposed towards the English.
 - 14 Claverhouse has been Romanticised, and sung about in Jacobite Scottish ballads such as 'Bonnie Dundee', but his other nickname, Bloody Clavers, is a great deal more appropriate.
 - 15 As expressed in The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication (1646) and A Free Disputation against Pretended Liberty of Conscience (1649).
 - 16 Like the Huguenot Philippe du Plessis-Mornay's *A Defence of Liberty Against Tyrants* (1579) and fellow Scot George Buchanan's famous treatise *De Jure Regni apud Scotos* (1579). Ironically, Buchanan was the childhood tutor of James VI (I), but his book played a substantial part in the downfall of the Stuart dynasty.
 - 17 Lex Rex, pp 8, 191-193.
 - 18 The present government's view on the hereditary peers has apparently little of novelty about it when one reads Lex Rex!
 - 19 Or federal Calvinist
 - 20 Also called by some the 'Adamic administration'.
 - 21 Articulated in The Tryal & Triumph of Faith (1645) and The Covenant of Life Opened (Edin 1655)
 - 22 such as, for example, Thomas Boston.
 - 23 He also disliked the term 'natural covenant' for the pre-fall covenant with man, and insisted on emphasising that this too was never of mere nature, but all of God's great condescension and grace.
 - 24 The rarity of such instruction is matched by corresponding biblical and theological illiteracy, even among children growing up in Christian homes. Could there be a connection?
 - 25 *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, with a foreword by Andrew Bonar, Banner of Truth, 1986.
 - 26 Such as with his friends David Dickson and Robert Blair over the Resolutioner / Protester issues.
 - 27 Words well known from the refrain in the hymn 'The sands of time are sinking' by Anne Ross Cousin, a hymn that blends in verse so many of Rutherford's own sayings, particularly culled from his Letters.

Ministry in the New Millennium

In the second of two articles the Rev. Stafford Carson outlines some of the strategies for the Church as we face the challenges of the new millennium.

Renewed confidence in the Word of God and in prayer

The Word and prayer: the basic tools

The first crisis which the apostolic church faced and successfully weathered is the incident in Acts 6. Some widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. But the problem ran much deeper than simply feeding people. It was basically a struggle and tension between church ministry and church structure. After all, a growing church, just like a growing child, occasionally requires new clothes. And the early church had to rethink its structure so that the structure would not impede the ministry.

What caused the problem? Was it just a matter of geography and prejudice, with the Hebrew-speaking Jews resenting the Greek-speaking Jews? According to Acts 6, the problem was caused by the apostles, the spiritual lead-

ers of the church. The apostles were so busy serving tables that their neglect of prayer and the ministry of the Word created a spiritual deficiency in the body of believers. Because the apostles' priorities were confused, their ministry was inhibited. Once the deacons were appointed, the problem was solved.

Ministry in the new millennium cannot be effective if it ignores the basic tools of the ministry. The church that ignores the word of God and prayer is living on substitutes, or perhaps we should say, *dying* on substitutes, no matter how alive the church body appears to be. The church is a divine institution that cannot succeed without divine power. That power comes through prayer and the ministry of the Word.

Approaches change, and often church structures must change if the church is to be effective. That's the lesson of Acts 6. But the essentials remain. 'We will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word'. Or as Eugene Peterson paraphrases it in *The Message*:

'Meanwhile, we'll stick to our assigned tasks of prayer and speaking God's Word'. Nothing should deflect us from making prayer and the Word of God the priorities of our ministries. If other duties take us away from those activities, then we need to re-organise things and get back on course again.

Small groups

Having understood that unchanged commitment to the Word of God and prayer, we may need to adjust the ways in which we organise the church around those priorities.

What I mean is that we may have to experiment with encouraging people to be involved in small groups rather than larger groups. Those pundits who analyse the trends in society tell us that baby boomers and baby busters prefer the living room atmosphere to the classroom atmosphere. In a post-modern world, truth needs to be processed relationally. So when it comes to Bible study, it's not a question of one expert who delivers

all the right answers in the formal setting of a lecture or classroom.

It's more about relationships, dialogue and the sharing of stories. The hard questions are answered as people interact with the truth and see how it applies to their situation. Church needs to become more intimate and it must involve those who attend. The preferred location becomes the living room rather than the lecture hall. The very name 'lecture hall' describes an approach which is less relevant to people today than it was 100 years ago.

The pre-eminence of prayer

If the small group Bible study becomes the preferred option that replaces the midweek meeting, then it is clear that the congregational prayer meeting may need to be re-thought as well; but we cannot allow the church to drop prayer as one of its priorities, and we have to ensure that prayer remains a pre-eminent activity of congregational life.

One of the greatest benefits of the evangelistic initiative taken by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland ('Life 2') has been the encouragement of prayer triplets as part of that programme. In my own congregation, I have been greatly encouraged at the response. Our congregational prayer meetings never got beyond 30 or 40, and were at times much smaller. No matter how much scolding, encouraging or pleading I did, people just wouldn't come. But when we introduced prayer triplets almost 200 people signed up immediately. It is still far smaller than it should be, but it's better than it was. Some of them are 'Irish' prayer triplets with 2 or 4 or 5 members! Is this the way forward?

Training leaders

If small groups become the way in which church members share in the ministry of the Word and in prayer, then we need to be active and ready to train people to lead these groups.

Again, the whole situation has changed when it comes to leadership. While the doctor, the teacher and the minister were the three educated people in a rural community 100 years ago, that is no longer the case. A higher per-

centage than ever before have been to university or college and most congregations have at least a few committed members who are well educated.

The traditional fear is that in allowing others to participate in the ministry of the Word, albeit in a small group, the minister would lose control, and it would result in cliques being formed and in strange and heretical doctrines being promoted. But in holding all the ministry of the Word in the hands of one person, we have not been consistent with our belief in the plurality of elders who are qualified to teach the Word and in the ministry of the Holy Spirit to equip others within the local congregation for this task.

Nothing should deflect us from making prayer and the Word of God the priorities of our ministries

Ministry in the new millennium will require the training of many more people to share in the work of the ministry and in leading others in understanding the Word and in prayer.

Ministry to children and young people

Ministry in the new millennium will need a new, fresh enthusiastic approach in our ministry to children and young people. I have tried to point out, many of the current generation of unchurched baby busters are ignorant about the fundamentals of the Christian faith. That in itself is a challenge to the Christian church.

Even when it comes to work among our own church families, we need a new enthusiasm and a new impetus. Remember that the greatest number of people come to faith in Christ before they reach adulthood. Does that not require us to put more resources into evangelism among children and young people? Does it not mean that every congregation should have a well thought out plan as to how it is going to see its young people converted and fully integrated within the life of the church?

Alert to Christian parents

In spite of the fact that so many man-hours are expended each week in our churches, they yield very little in terms of young adults being present in our churches in significant numbers. We need to ask if the style of youth ministry adopted in the 1950s and 1960s really has been effective. And if it hasn't been effective, why do we still hold on to it? Personally I believe that much of our present approach to youth work seriously misses the mark. The evidence for that view is the major lack of young adults in many of our congregations.

I believe that in terms of our approach to young people, we need to be much

be well founded if we insist on holding on to patterns of ministry that are outdated and ineffective, but that doesn't have to be the case. We need to develop a new vision for a vibrant, Reformed and biblical church. The church of the new century may not have many of the organisations and activities that characterised the church of the 20th century. And many of the things we think are essential to present-day church programmes may disappear.

People not organisations

There may be no uniformed youth organisations, no evening services or no midweek fellowships. One gathering for worship on the Lord's Day may be sufficient, but it may last longer than 65 or 70 minutes. Church fellowships may be smaller and more intimate, focused more in small groups meeting in the homes of its members. Congregations may not see the need to have huge suites of church halls which are expensive to build and expensive to maintain.

Some congregations may soon learn the basic lesson that the church is people and not buildings and will structure their priorities accordingly. What we have at the moment in some urban areas are congregations with great buildings but with no people. We need very quickly to begin to invest our resources in what really counts for the work of the kingdom and to have a vision for people rather than property.

A contextualised Gospel

But whilst congregational life may change, the church will remain. God will see to it that His church and kingdom will be established in the new millennium. There will be those whose faith in the Covenant Lord will not waver, and who will, with the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit, develop new and effective ways of 'doing church' in the next century. 'It will be kirk, Captain, but not as we know it'. The Gospel will, as in New Testament times, be contextualised in our society and community. The Reformed faith, founded on the revealed will of God in the Bible, will continue to inspire and direct the lives of many Christians and will enthuse

CONTINUED ON PAGE 33

The church of the new century may not have many of the organisations and activities that characterised the church of the 20th century

more covenantal and family-based. We need to alert Christian parents to the enormous influence which they exercise over their children. And we need to realise that a ministry to young people doesn't just begin when they become adolescents.

As a denomination, in spite of our covenant theology, we have not seriously engaged parents in evangelising and nurturing their young people in the faith. Perhaps over these next few years someone in our church will have the time to spell out the theological rationale for youth ministry and will help us to be more effective in our work and to stem the drift of young people away from the church. Until that happens those of us at the sharp end of parish ministry will have to keep working at improving our ministry and evangelism among our children and young people. We need to make that aspect of our work a priority in the next few years.

New Vision for the New Millennium

It is all too easy for us to give up and to become pessimistic about the future of the church. Some of that pessimism may

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

them in the task of mission and evangelism.

As Bill Hybels says, 'There is nothing like the local church when the local church is working the way it ought to!' The local church is the God-ordained means for the evangelism of the world and the discipling of the nations. That work will not fail. We pray that the Church of God in our land will be part of that work and ministry. It could be the case that the Reformed Church in the new millennium will grow and develop in spite of us and not because of us.

Evangelism:

A priority for the

(A revised version of an address to the Synod of the Methodist Church in Scotland on 24th April, 1999)¹

Early in 1999 my friend and colleague John Drane went to speak at a conference organised by the Church of England which, in his words, was 'to mark the official end of the Decade of Evangelism'. I suspect that he felt like me that this was a very curious thing to be doing, and that we would both want to say that the decade should simply be or have been the dry run for a millennium of evangelism. I can think of nothing more important than that I should emphasise this point to Christians in Scotland (and everywhere else!) just in case there is the faintest danger of any of us being tempted to think that now we can take a respite from evangelism and do something else instead.

The world adopts our language

One of the curiosities of the present time is the way that Christian language is being taken over by the world even though it is being used less or scarcely at all by Christians. The word 'millennium' is a case in point, where the Christian hope expressed in the vivid imagery of Revelation 20 has now been secularised to signify the next

thousand years or the end of the last 999 years. At the very least it gives us an opening to get at the real meaning of the millennium, which may make a change for preachers from the real meaning of Christmas.

However, I'm more concerned at the way in which the term 'mission' has been taken over by the world to signify the purpose identified by a company or a university or other institution for itself in relation to the community, and a keen salesman or political canvasser can be described as an 'evangelist' or as being 'evangelical' in his/her fervour. It seems to be a case of why should the saints have all the best words? But the worrying feature is that at the time when the world is discovering the potential of these words and de-theologising them, we in the church are failing to use them or to practise what they signify. That excellent word evangelism signifies the church's marching orders to inform people of the significance of Christ, to persuade them of their need of the gospel, and to encourage them to commit themselves to Christ and so become part of his people.

It would seem obvious that this is what the church is for, if we stand in any kind of continuity with the New Testament church, and yet often it does not happen. Some of us are irrationally embarrassed at the thought of attempting it, and I confess to my own guilt. Or we seek refuge in a concept of mission, which can be inter-

preted more broadly of the total activity of Christian believers in society but can sometimes be taken to embrace all such activity with the exception of evangelism. Meanwhile the church declines in numbers, and the decline, it has been well argued, represents a failure in evangelism rather than anything else.

Pearls before pigs

The problem, of course, may not be that we don't believe in evangelism and are not trying to do what we were raised up to do. It may be rather that we have tried and tried, but we have made little or no impact and had little or no success. Despite our best endeavours, despite our prayers, and despite the way in which many congregations are now in a much better state of spiritual health than they were in the past, we find ourselves unable to make contact with unbelievers and agnostics and so we are not getting the message across, and this has made us discouraged and we may tend to give up. In short, a better diagnosis of the situation may be that in some cases we have tried and got nowhere, and therefore we have cut down on what does not appear to work. We have knocked on doors or pressed the entry buttons on security systems, we have distributed invitations and Easter cards, we have tried to run our holiday clubs, but nothing has worked. Less and less children come to Sunday School, and a

new millennium

Howard I Marshall, Aberdeen

generation is growing up around us which knows nothing of the gospel and assumes that it does not need it.

And yet there are some churches in this country which are growing and making an impact, and, yes, there are other countries where the church is growing fast, so what is wrong with this country or with what we are doing? Does the problem lie in our failure to do evangelism the right way, or does it lie in the stony nature of the ground in which we sow the seed, or is it some combination of the two? It is after all possible to ram your head against a brick wall. And there is such a thing as not casting your pearls before pigs. And yet I can't really believe that the ground is all that impervious or that our fellow human beings are as unreceptive as the proverbial swine. And I certainly can't believe that the Lord's hand is so shortened that it cannot save. So are we doing it wrong, and is there a better way?

I wish that I had a magical, or rather, as I should say among Christians, miraculous solution to the problem. I can probably do no more than encourage us all to do better the things that we are doing already, and what I have is a series of points which may stimulate you to think of better ones.

If we aim at nothing we'll hit it

First, I am convinced that some congregations fail to achieve anything

because they don't have any specific targets that they want to achieve. And therefore our church councils (or whatever you call them in your particular congregational setup) need to meet and pray and plan ahead to produce a set of aims or objectives that under God we will seek to achieve over a specific period of time. Then we need to look back at the end of the period and assess what we did, and whether we did it right or wrong. Only by establishing goals will we achieve results, be it in evangelism or anything else.

I said 'church councils', but I have a strong suspicion that they may not necessarily be the best place to start; they tend to be conservative, and often fresh ideas will develop in a smaller group, and therefore a working party disguised as a committee is often necessary to get things moving. We've recently set up a 'mission and fellowship committee' in our congregation to do the catalysing. I also said 'pray', and I wonder whether we ought not on occasion to turn our councils or committees into prayer meetings in which we seek the face and mind of God.

Secondly, we need to recover the priority of evangelism as a church activity. It is certainly not the only activity of the church, and there is a good case that evangelism and practical love to the community should go hand in hand, although I tend to think that in the New

Testament evangelism probably has the priority. But, be that as it may, it doesn't matter too much so long as we establish that among the two or three cardinal duties of the church and its key activities, evangelism is essential.

I suspect that sometimes we have thought that the purpose of congregational gatherings is to worship God, and I believe that this is misleading in that all our activity as Christians is done to the glory of God. But congregational activities according to Paul are for the building up of the congregation, and he used this as a criterion for what should and should not take place; we worship God through building up the congregation, and we worship God through evangelism, and we worship God through showing love to the world, as well as through our prayers and praises. When we declare the mighty acts of God that bring salvation, we are simultaneously proclaiming the gospel and also praising God.

Three clear targets

Third, we have to remember that evangelism can take place at three levels or rather in three concentric circles.

At the centre is ourselves and our own families and close friends. They are our priority. Here I quote John Drane at the Church of England Conference: 'We often say that if we could only get people into the church they would real-

ise that what it has to offer is good news. But it is the people who know us best, from inside, who are rejecting us.... If we could merely hold on to our own children, who desert the church in droves, the decline would be turned around'. Is God saying something to us about priorities within evangelism itself?

There is a danger among evangelical Christians of looking down on the nominal church-members and adherents and wishing that we could strike them off the church roll and have a congregation of pure saints (like ourselves!)

It's not always, of course, a case of parents evangelising children; it can be the other way round. Years ago, William Still ran a series of three successive weekly posters outside Gilcomston South Church: (1) Parents, your children need Christ! to be succeeded the following week by (2) Children, your parents need Christ! and culminating in (3) You need Christ! We need to think seriously about how we do evangelism in families, given that in so many families only one or two members may be believers.

Our second target must be those people who have a marginal attachment to the church, and with whom therefore we do have some kind of contact, however tenuous, that can be exploited. There is a danger among evangelical Christians of looking down on the nominal church-members and adherents and wishing that we could strike them off the church roll and have a congregation of pure saints (like ourselves!). How wrong can we be? Here are people for whom the Christian faith does mean (or did mean) something, and we have a ready-built connection with them, an opportunity to be gladly grasped. There is a lot to be said for maintaining two lists, one the actual church roll of members and the other

the 'community roll' of people with whom we have a link.

This situation implies, of course, that evangelism will be one of the aims of ordinary church services because in perhaps the majority of cases we cannot assume that everybody present is a committed Christian and therefore the gospel

invitation must be a regular part of our services.

The third target we have is the people outside the church altogether, with whom we must establish links in other ways. I am told that in some Anglican churches in the south east of England, people try to shop in the same three or four local shops all the time, simply in order that they can build up relationships with the people who work there and with their fellow-shoppers, so that, when there is some special event, they can invite people with whom they have built up links and established confidence.

We need to be aware of the existence of these three circles and address the specific problems of how we target each of them. But there are other targets to be considered as well. For example, we need to remember the elementary fact that most people who become Christians do so in their earlier years rather than their later years. We should be taking advantage of this fact, and therefore we should be targeting that broad age group.

Another significant group is the young parent who often feels a sense of deep inadequacy at the immense responsibility of bringing up a child in a society beset by so many problems and dangers. Those who have recently had a child

are very often aware of the need of 'outside help' (grace) and can be open to the hand of friendship from the local congregation.

Nevertheless, we need to begin where we are, and with the contacts that we have, and so we should be considering what we can do with the analysis of our constituency that I have suggested.

User friendly services

Fourthly, we need to consider how the Willow Creek pattern can be appropriately adapted for church activity in Scotland. I am perfectly well aware that it is a controversial approach and in its full form it will not be appropriate everywhere. And there are other patterns being developed in North America which should also be considered such as Saddleback Valley Community Church, California.² Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Manhattan, New York also offers a model of imaginative outreach under the able leadership of Dr Tim Keller.

However, whatever we do that is novel, there is always the danger that a radical approach can sometimes help us to lose the faithful members that we already have if it is not adopted sensitively and cautiously. The three examples just quoted all had the great advantage of being started as entirely new congregations without any past history. Where there is an established tradition in a church, special skills and diplomacy are needed in order to hold the congregation together so that moves to change are achieved without sacrificing the unity of the members.

The crucial element which I am commending is that the open meetings of the church are designed to be attractive to the hoped-for audience rather than to the saints, and so they frankly make use of the methods adopted by the media and the world of entertainment to attract people instead of expecting them to accept our kind of music and our sort of spiritual and worshipping activities. Evangelism is about building bridges, yes, but it is we who have to go out across them rather than expect the people to come to us.

There is one church in Aberdeen

which has gone in this general direction by developing an 'alternative church' on its premises, a Sunday evening meeting where they can have the kind of music that they want without offending the purists and the classicists, and experiment with different styles of presenting the gospel, and get people involved, instead of being there merely as spectators. Similar things have been happening in some churches in Edinburgh, and the Edinburgh presbytery of the Church of Scotland has recently endorsed a pilot scheme for parallel congregations in the same building, offering different kinds of services for completely different people, traditional and contemporary. I suspect that we shall always have both kinds of people, and we need to cater for the needs of all.

Putting Humpty together again

Fifthly, since we are often lacking in the resources of people and materials as individual congregations, we should be working together with other congregations to pool our resources and do together what we cannot do by ourselves. Perhaps we should accept that the broken pieces of ecclesiastical egg-shell cannot be pieced together no matter how hard all the king's horses and all the king's men try! We have wasted people-hours by the thousand talking about church unity instead of coming together and working together for the Christian good of Scotland; surely we don't need to discuss the nature of the ministry for ever and whether or not we need bishops or elders as a precondition for getting on with the task. I am eternally thankful for learning in my student days to work together with Christians from many denominations and to recognise that denominations don't matter a brass button so long as we are agreed on the fundamentals of the gospel; the things which ecumenical discussions tend to ignore because they can be taken for granted.

It follows that very often the natural groupings for evangelism will not be with the other churches in a Methodist Circuit which may be geographically distant, as in my own Circuit³ or in places as distant as Perth, Dundee and

Blairgowrie, or with our sister Baptist Churches in other towns, but rather with our immediate neighbours who may be Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Baptists, Brethren, or whatever. It is lamentable that so often we go our separate ways, and ecumenical activity means nothing more than a few poorly attended united services.

Personally, I believe we could solve

Evangelism is about building bridges, yes, but it is we who have to go out across them rather than expect the people to come to us

the problem of Christian unity if instead of making unity an aim in itself we inverted the slogan of 'one church united for mission', and began with mission and worked together instead of endlessly talking and getting nowhere. I firmly believe that ecumenical conversations are often the modern-day equivalent to the fruitless speculations and debates that are condemned so vigorously in the Pastoral Epistles precisely because they achieved nothing useful.

Cyberspace

Sixthly, by pooling our resources we may be able to do the things that we cannot do at a local level. I am thinking of the crucial importance of using the media since this is the most potent force around for reaching people, and the churches must ensure that they have a place in it. At the moment the Christian religion seems to be being squeezed more and more into ever narrower marginal slots, and we need to resist this and find an answer to it. Maybe we need to recognise that over the next few years the internet is going to be as influential as radio and TV, and we should be getting in on the act with urgency and imagination. And that requires expertise rather than bungling amateurism if it is to make any impact on society around us. What resources are we putting into it, and where are the people to take up

the challenge? Here is a matter that needs strategy, planning, and the use of our united resources of people-power and funds.

Hi-tech celebrations

Seventh, I don't know what the future of big evangelistic rallies in a football stadium is. Despite all the criticisms made of them I believe that they have been

effective; it is true that they have often helped people who were already contacted by Christians to come to the crisis point of faith rather than reaching people who were totally outsiders, but what is wrong with that? Admittedly this still leaves us with the problem of reaching the total outsiders, and we need to face up to that challenge also.

Where the rallies have failed, it has usually been in the so-called follow-up which has in my opinion not been persevered with as it should have been, not least because it is not an easy operation. But the rally-type of event in a neutral venue (like the recent Edinburgh events in the Festival Theatre on the first Sunday of the new millennium) can be very effective, both for bringing Christians together in celebration and also in evangelism.

Small group evangelism

Finally, it may be that other methods will be appropriate for the immediate future. The Alpha approach has been remarkably effective and continues to be so. The concept of a meal, or series of meals, to which people invite their friends in an unthreatening environment to think seriously about the Christian faith is now tried and tested; it has in fact been used since the beginning of Christianity, and the basic recipe is sound. David Searle tells me that it was very effective in

Newhills nearly thirty years ago and resulted in some scores of professions of faith.

The underlying approach, let me remind you, is the same as that of the big rally, in that people bring their friends, for more people take the first steps to conversion apparently through personal relationships than through being intellectually convinced about the gospel. So at least says Alan Le Grys in his book *Preaching to the Nations* (SPCK), a fascinating study of evangelism in the early church which appeared very recently. Friendship cemented over a meal and leading to a sense of belonging provides the right introduction to discussion and presentation of the Gospel.

Is our problem perhaps that we haven't any non-Christian friends? I raise the question as somebody who is conscious of being something of a fail-

ure in this area. Maybe the first thing we need to do is to be more friendly and to make more friends outside the church.

In conclusion

I have said nothing very new, since all of these ideas are being tried around Scotland, Ireland and elsewhere in the UK already. I hope that if you think that there is something in them, then we shall practise them all the more, and if you are not impressed by them, then I hope that I have at least initiated a conversation through which we may find better ways of evangelism. The one thing that matters above all else is the priority of the practice of evangelism in our congregations — that Christian churches again become evangelising churches, with outreach integral to all we do together as God's people — and I pray that we may live in the new century empow-

ered by the Spirit to do what will glorify our God in the extension of his kingdom on earth.

- 1 I should like to express my thanks to David Searle for commenting very helpfully on an earlier draft of this article and making a number of suggestions which I have been glad to incorporate. I am particularly grateful for information about events furth of Aberdeen which illustrate some of the points made in the article.
- 2 See Rick Warren's, *The Purpose Driven Church*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1995.
- 3 Howard Marshall is a member of Crown Terrace Methodist Church, Aberdeen.
Editor

Sursum Corda!

A sermon by James S Stewart
first published in 1940

When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draws near—Luke 21: 28.

When Jesus spoke these words, he turned history upside down. Once this has been said, everything that makes up the usual stock-in-trade of a whole tribe of worldly-wise commentators on the human scene is rendered obsolete for ever. All our habitual judgments and valuations are challenged and overruled by this piercing, dramatic insight of the Son of God.

Crisis and convulsion

'When these things begin to come to pass.' Glance back across the chapter and see what things are meant. It is no description of calm weather and peaceful prospects that meets you here. It is the most devastating catalogue of crisis and convulsion, of formidable, ruthless forces playing havoc with good men's dreams.

These words of Jesus are full of the crash and thunder of the storm — nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; earthquakes, famines, pestilences, fearful sights and signs from heaven; persecutions, inquisitions, racial hatreds, martyrdoms; the whole world gone mad, and 'men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the

earth.' When these things come to pass, said Jesus, these intolerably grim and harrowing things, these things of which the tender conscience would say that they just do not bear thinking about; when all you can do is helplessly to watch the human situation deteriorating, and the frenzied altercations growing still more turbulent and furious, and the tide of violence mounting till it is rushing like a great river in spate; when your own mind is confused, and your nerves reeling, and your spirit near despair — then, said Jesus, look up! Lift up your heads!

Supremely relevant

Do you not feel that this chapter might have sprung straight out of the background of the present day? We shall be far wrong if we suppose that this was simply Jesus' forecast of the fearful fate that Rome was keeping in store for Jerusalem the city of God. It was that, no doubt, but certainly it was also far more. 'When these things begin to come to pass': who can ponder the picture here, and not feel that it is supremely relevant now?

Moreover, there is this to be said. You have not faced the real seriousness of any Dark Age in the world's history, or of any dark night in your own personal experience, when you have simply recounted the external facts of the situation. For far more ominous than

the physical facts are the potential spiritual consequences of the facts. I mean that there is always a possibility that an individual, or a whole age, under the pressure of terrible events, may suffer total eclipse in the region of faith.

The hour of darkness

Things may go so radically and bitterly wrong that the basic convictions on which life is built are shaken, and the very foundations begin to rock and quiver, and the whole edifice threatens to collapse before the assault of the ultimate doubt. That, nothing less, is the really sinister menace — that hour of awful darkness in which the human heart begins to suspect that there is no rationality anywhere, that right and wrong and good and evil are mere figures of speech, not solid and substantial facts; that divine Fatherhood is a myth, and providence an illusion, and any spiritual interpretation of life a fantastic self-deception, and all man's striving purposeless and futile. 'When these things begin to come to pass,' said Jesus, when that fierce threat is getting you by the throat, that stifling doubt endeavouring to suffocate your soul, then what then?

Finish the sentence! Shall we say, 'When these things come, all hope abandon'? That is what our natural instinct says. 'The lights that you have seen extinguished can never be rekindled. The

blessed hours of peace and confidence and joy in the Lord are coming back no more. You may as well hang up your harps upon the willows once for all, and forget you ever learnt the happy songs of Zion, and resign yourselves to the miseries of Babylon, and to the slow doom, pitiless, unending. When these things come to pass, then — farewell hope! Enter — despair! And weep for the days that are dead.' So speaks the wisdom of the world. So speaks perhaps, in such a day as this, the voice of our own hearts. But not so speaks Christ! Not so speaks the One who above all others has a right to speak. 'When these things come, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.'

Flashing insight

With that flashing thrust of divine insight, He challenges and reverses and contradicts our all too human interpretation of the world and of our own tangled experience. I do want you to grasp the thrilling and really revolutionary truth to which these words of Jesus point. It is this, that the same crises, calamities, hours of desolation and heartbreak, which to the natural man constitute a flat denial of God — these very things are actually, to the spiritual man, a new tremendous revelation of God. They shake the faith of the one, they confirm the faith of the other. 'This is the end of everything,' says the one. 'No,' says the other, 'this is my God marching on in judgment and in mercy.' And all the prophetic spirits who have ever lived have verified Christ's interpretation and discovery, and cry to us to-day to believe it, for it is true.

'For we are afar with the dawning
And the suns that are not yet high,
And out of the infinite morning
Intrepid you hear us cry — how, spite
of your human scorning,

Once more God's future draws nigh.'
When these things come to pass, says Jesus, when all the ways of life are darkened, and you can scarce see the road beneath your feet, when the terror by night is a grim reality, and your soul is bowed to the ground beneath the weary load of bitter disillusionment and cares

*If the valley is black
and murky, remember
the stars!*

that sap your strength away — then look up! Lift up your head! Think not that the immediate aspect of things is the final truth. If the valley is black and murky, remember the stars! If the shadow of Herod is darkening the world, hark to the angels singing over Bethlehem! If your soul is stumbling in the gloom, reach out for the hand of the Lord!

Blessed Ministries

Would it not be true to say that it is precisely this faculty of looking up, that is to say, of adding on to life a new dimension, which differentiates man from all the rest of creation? And (to digress from our main theme for a moment) think of all the blessed ministries God has devised, for the specific purpose — it would seem — of helping and enabling us, even in the darkest days, to stand with lifted head! The gracious ministry of home; the light in the dear eyes of a woman who has given you her heart, and has been amazingly loyal to you through everything, and patient and understanding; the memory of an hour when, awed and strangely thrilled, you stood beside a cradle, and vowed that for the sake of that new, tender, helpless life committed to your care you would sanctify yourself, and walk for ever in the light; and all the rich manifold variety of God's other avenues of approach, in Nature, and music, and the sacrament of friendship where heart speaks to heart; and unexpected acts of kindness that touch grey days with loveliness and colour; and deeds of sudden chivalry that make an old world young again; and moments when the House of God has been to you no ordinary meeting-place, but a veritable shrine, a gate of heaven, because of the authentic presence of the Lord — are these not all means that God has lovingly devised to enable us, however dark and rough the way, however crushing and oppressive the tyranny of circumstance, to look up, and lift our heads, and stabilize our staggering souls by a rediscovery of the unseen and the eternal?

Facts of History

But to return. I ask you to observe that

Christ's appeal to His followers to lift up their heads in desperate days was no piece of sentimental bravado, encouraging baseless hopes. There was a reason for the upward look; and very definitely and unequivocally He told them of it. 'For your redemption draweth nigh.' In other words, when things are at their worst, you had better be alert and wakeful, more vigilant than than ever, for that is the likeliest hour for a new decisive emergence of the Spirit of God upon the scene.

Has not that insight of Jesus been verified repeatedly by the facts of history? Think, for instance, of the witness of the Old Testament. What were the times in the annals of Israel when the Hebrew religious genius recorded its greatest achievements, and faith made another forward leap? Not the peaceful, prosperous days of a Solomon in all his glory. No, but the days of deluge and disaster, when the proud waters of the Babylonian wrath were going over Israel's soul — then the faith leapt to life, then the very pressure of catastrophe threw up another prophet, and another, to cry aloud and reassert the unshaken, everlasting spiritual realities. And what was that but redemption drawing near?

Or think of the history of the Christian Church. What have been the eras of the Church's greatest influence? What have been the moments of its most powerful impact on the world? Not the epochs of its visible might and splendour; not the age succeeding Constantine, when Christianity became imperialistic, and all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them seemed ready to bow beneath the sceptre of the Christ; not the days of the great medieval pontiffs, when Christ's vicar in Rome wielded a sovereignty more absolute than that of any secular monarch on the earth; not the later nineteenth century, when the Church became infected with the prevailing humanistic optimism, which was quite sure that man was the architect of his own destinies, that a wonderful utopian kingdom of God was waiting him just round the corner, and that the very momentum of his progress was bound to carry him thither. Not in such times as these has the

*when things are at
their worst... that is
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Spirit of God upon
the scene*

Church exercised its strongest leverage upon the soul and conscience of the world: but in days when it has been crucified with Christ, and has counted all things but loss for His sake; days when, smitten with a great contrition and repentance, it has cried out to God from the depths. Then indeed — in a Francis, a Luther, a Wesley — the time of the singing of birds has come, and the air has been full of the Hallelujahs of revival. And what is that but redemption drawing nigh?

Personal Experience

You can see it in the realm of personal experience. The man who has had all fortune's favours showered upon him is not generally the man whom God finds it easiest to reach; and a soul that is completely at ease in Zion, and comfortably conscious of its own rectitude and resources, can be a desperately difficult target even for the winged arrows of Christ. But show me a man who has reached the point of saying, 'I'm beaten! I'm just about done for. I thought once that I could manage life successfully, that I had qualifications and reserves of power adequate to any demands it would make upon me, that the arm of flesh could drive a path for me through any obstacles I might ever have to meet; but now, I am at the end of my tether, now the radical lie in all that humanist philosophy is being found out, now I know exactly what I am, a poor, lame, helpless creature; and O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?' — show me a man like that, and I will tell you, There is a man to whom God is on the way, and his redemption is drawing nigh!

There, then, is the fact — that again and again in the history of the world, in the life of the Church, in the experience of the individual, the darkest and most hopeless hours have prelude a new advent and invasion of the Spirit of God. Of that fact there is no manner of doubt.

Self trust

But I wonder can we, ere we close, go one step further, and point to a possible explanation of the fact? I think we can. Why is it that God acts in such a paradoxical way, using the blackest and most

desperately unlikely hour for His entrance upon the scene? I believe the explanation is this — that it is precisely in such hours that the one thing which most impedes the divine activity is apt to get broken down; and that is man's self-trust. Sooner or later we have to face the uncomfortable truth that the greatest barrier to the fashioning of a new world, to the vitalizing of a dynamic Church, to the growing of a Christlike character, is just man's stubborn trust in himself. It is the last thing that even the religious man is prepared to give up. But give it up he must, or else be finally frustrated in his quest for the pearl of great price, which is the kingdom of God in the heart.

I am not thinking now, mark you, of conscious and Pharisaic self-righteousness: that, if you believe the New Testament, is the most damning sin of all, far more dangerous, more utterly certain (as Jesus said) to disqualify a soul for life eternal than even the gross sins of the flesh. But I am not thinking of that. I am thinking of human nature's tenacious and ineradicable instinct to trust its own achievements. 'Most men,' said Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, 'are so possessed by themselves that they have no vacuum into which God's deep water may rise.' The whole of life is evidence of that. Man is intellectual, and trusts his science to redeem the world and build the New Jerusalem. He is patriotic, and trusts his race or nation to secure the future of civilization. He is philanthropic, and trusts his humanistic ideals to permeate the lump of social life till the whole is leavened. He is religious, and trusts his Church to organize the kingdom of heaven into existence. He

is moral, and trusts his personal virtues to justify him in the sight of God.

'Have I not worked hard?' he asks himself, assessing his own spiritual worth. 'Have I not been a man of my word? Have I not lived a disciplined life, and fought down temptation, and cultivated virtues, and been assiduous in the ordinances of religion, and paid my debts, and given to charity, and honoured all men, and loved the brotherhood, and feared God, and honoured the king?' These are the things we carry in our hands right up to the throne of grace, as if they gave us a claim upon God, and earned us His favourable consideration, and merited salvation. 'See, Lord,' we exclaim, 'all this in my hands I bring! I would not dream of coming empty-handed. All this can go down to the credit side of the account!'

The Contrite Heart

What we so tragically fail to realize is that by that instinctive attitude, that native trust in our own virtues and achievements, we are automatically excluding ourselves from the very blessings which we hoped to reach. Our very spirituality, if you will understand me, is robbing us of God's Spirit. Not so does the true redemption ever draw nigh! The sacrifices of God are not an imposing array of creditable achievements. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart. If something really breaks you down, so that virtues and good works count no longer, and you cry with Job 'I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes'; if some day of storm and darkness leaves you stripped of every shred of satisfied self-trust, and of every

vestige of conscious claim upon God — then look up, for your redemption will be coming over the horizon. But not before!

You have to experience the darkness that descends when all the flickering candles of personal merit have gone out, before you can discern, rising out of the gloom to meet you, the light that never was on sea or land. You have to feel the foundations shake beneath your feet, before you can sing 'Rock of Ages' as it should be sung. You have to 'faint for the flaming of Christ's advent feet,' and cry 'Watchman, what of the night?' before you can know the thrill of Christmas morning, and the glory of the Word made flesh, and the sheer irrepressible excitement of that ringing, tumultuous shout — 'Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!' You have to have looked into the horrible abyss of doubt and despair before you can really believe. You have to see everything falling from your grasp, and to cry 'Nothing in my hands I bring,' before Christ's strong pierced hands can grip and hold you. You have to suffer crucifixion in the region of self, before you can rise from the dead the third day with the new life of God throbbing in your heart.

Lift up your heart

So when these things come to pass, these desolating things that leave all self-trust shattered and in ruin, look up, and lift up your head, knowing that your light is come, that the glory of the Lord is risen upon you, and your redemption draweth nigh!

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Pros and Cons of every

Norman Maciver, Newhills Parish Church, Aberdeen

This is a synopsis of a discussion paper presented to the Rutherford House Church & Ministry Group in September 1999. It is the story of ministry that is still evolving as it seeks more faithfully to reflect biblical principles that will better help the church to serve the community through the ministry of the gospel.

Who and where are we?

Newhills Church is my first and only charge. I came here in August 1976. We were originally a rural charge with the present church buildings still sitting in a fairly isolated position towards the top of a hill almost a mile from the main area of suburban housing. The congregation was founded in 1662 and relocated from a nearby site to the present building in 1830. There have been no unions and we operate under a Quoad Omnia Constitution.¹ During the years of my ministry our communicant membership has increased from 900 to just over 1100.

All the work of the church is structured under ten different Ministry Teams each led by a Convener who is an elder, thus ensuring both supervision by, and accountability to, the spiritual leadership in the Kirk Session. There is also a frontline team of ten 'ministers', some of whom are not in fact elders. A crucial

and foundational basis to the wider ministry is prayer, with very full printed information available to the whole congregation each week and mid-week. This ministry is directed by an appointed Prayer Co-ordinator and there are six different prayer meetings throughout any given week.

Church neighbourhood network

Some years back we re-structured our communication and, therefore, our pastoral network. We moved from the more traditional Elder/District relationship into what we call a Church Neighbour Network. The nature of the parish lends itself to this kind of structure whereby members are grouped in six or seven homes, geographically compact, and one of those homes is responsible for keeping contact with the others in that particular area and reporting regularly back to Pastoral Team. There is also an appointed member of our Pastoral Team who is solely responsible for encouraging and enabling the Church Neighbours of whom there are about 104.

Church plant

As far as our buildings are concerned, virtually all of them have been renovated, adapted and altered over the time of my ministry. I was the first occupant of a purpose-built manse. Two years after my arrival we redeveloped the sanctu-

ary taking out pews on the ground floor and replacing them with movable chairs. In 1989 we opened and dedicated a new suite of halls adjacent to the church under a 'Building in Faith' project, costing us about £250,000. Another important part of our plant consists of a reconstructed stables property with a small cottage integral to that property. We have used the cottage consistently as part of our ministry with, at present, our full-time Youth Minister occupying it.

Finances

Financially, the congregation had become self-supporting just prior to my arrival. At that time our annual income was in the region of £5,000 and now in total we would be over £120,000. Another significant change in this area is that we now contribute between 30% and 40% of our annual income to projects and mission outwith the congregation.

Spiritual leadership

A central part of our ecclesiology is that the Kirk Session has been released for its primary function of Spiritual Leadership. All elders, of course, according to their gifts are part of one of the teams, but we have been working at encouraging our eldership to see their primary role in the discernment of God's will, developing a vision for the congregation and encouraging the wider

member ministry

congregation in their ministry.

Every issue that is to do with policy has to be submitted to the Kirk Session. In addition, with each team being led by an elder there is immediate access to the floor of the Kirk Session from each area of ministry. Furthermore, each of our team of 'ministers' reports annually in person to a stated meeting of the Kirk Session.

Why do it this way?

I had the blessing of following the Rev David Searle and therefore the benefit of something quite unusual in the Church of Scotland. We are a congregation which has had two consecutive evangelical bible-based, although different styles of ministry. I owe him, as does the congregation, a great debt. My own background, which certainly significantly influenced my understanding of ministry in my early years, encouraged me to see my ministry as a traditional one-man ministry with an emphasis on preaching and pastoral care. My Western Isles family background encouraged, if not demanded, such an understanding of ministry. I sat under a very dominant yet, in many ways, singularly successful ministry in Glasgow and my theological studies also served to confirm this style of ministry.

Re-think

However, some years after coming to Newhills, I came face to face with the situation that demanded at least the beginning of a re-think. One of my very able and experienced elders, a head teacher and Teacher Training College lecturer, indicated that he was taking early retirement. For some time I had been concerned to use this man's gifts in a more public way and, as we discussed the future and prayed together, it became clear that here was a man who could take a frontline place in ministry by my side.

This led to his appointment through the Kirk Session and he was set apart within the context of a service of worship on a Sunday morning as our first lay member of the Ministry Team. We were careful to choose a title that stepped on no toes and caused no official unrest and so he served under the title of Lay Associate Pastor.

This led me, and some others, to a fresh examination of the scriptural teaching on ministry. Crucial to this was Ephesians 4:11-12: 'It was Christ who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up.' Thus the primary task of ministers, we began to discover, was not to do the work of the ministry themselves, rather

to prepare and enable God's people for the work of ministry. Other biblical passages in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, pointed up the theological truth that all members of Christ's body, the Church, are gifted by the Holy Spirit and therefore all are called to ministry within the context of the body for the sake of the world and to the glory of God.

Shared responsibility

Looking at Exodus 18:13-23 we learn of the wise Jethro encouraging his son-in-law Moses to share tasks of leadership and responsibility. The same occurs in the remarkable re-building of the walls of Jerusalem recorded in Nehemiah 2-3, where again we find evidence that it was a co-operative effort to achieve the final goal.

All this was underlined for us when we revisited the book of Acts, particularly 6:1-7, there to see another sharing of ministry, responsibility and focus. Interestingly in this passage it is a still growing church that restructures to meet what, on the surface, is a very straightforward problem. In so doing, the diaconate is established and the apostles give their attention 'to prayer and the ministry of the word'.

The consequences of this in Acts I have always found to be quite staggering. First of all, the Word of God spread, surely the major task of the church and

My own background, which certainly significantly influenced my understanding of ministry in my early years, encouraged me to see my ministry as a traditional one-man ministry with an emphasis on preaching and pastoral care

when that happened the Spirit of God worked and so the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly. Fascinatingly the as yet 'unreached people-group' of priests became obedient to the faith.

Thus the biblical evidence was systematically pointing our leaders to further exploration and indeed experimentation with the ministry of all God's people.

Interestingly, this is now rapidly becoming the focussed policy for the future of ministry within our own denomination, in part accelerated by the dramatic decline in candidates for the ministry. However, I am not particularly content with what is essentially a pragmatic approach to a current need, but rather feel that the healthier position is to adopt a theological approach that is rooted in biblical experience.

Growth in the ministry team

As this was developing, my congregation in 1985 suggested a sabbatical and I arranged in consultation with the Kirk Session to study three specific areas of ministry that already were a part of the ongoing life and ministry of our church — homiletics, lay ministry and small group Bible study. I spent some seven weeks in the United States focussing on these agreed areas in the context of a Theological College as well as two large congregations.

On my return our team of ministers began to grow, as with the discernment of the Kirk Session we appointed new members, always setting them apart in the context of congregational worship. We had noted that in the early years of my ministry when I was absent from the

pulpit (in those days invariably because of holidays), the congregational attendance dropped. I felt this to be a discourtesy to those who came to conduct pulpit supply ministry. We therefore focussed on a small group of people and encouraged them to lead the services when I was not there (we then had a Reader² in membership) and that basic pattern has now developed until each quarter-year around fifty people will participate in the leadership of weekly worship.

The system is very simple with one person leading worship, thus choosing most of the praise and leading prayers, another reading the lessons, a third talking to the children and also choosing the children's praise and then a preacher. I tend to do most of the latter myself. An attractive prospect in this context, particularly for our Finance Team, is that we estimate that, over the years we have saved around £10,000 in pulpit supply fees. The whole process is undergirded by our Prayer Ministry.

Ministry structures

At the same time the present Ministry Team structure has also developed significantly. Our teams are Worship, Outreach, Children, Youth, Adult Education, Pastoral Care, Administration, Publicity, Fabric, Finance — ten in all. The current membership of our Team of Ministers is the Senior Minister, one Pastoral Associate, two Pastoral Assistants, an Adult Education minister, Children's Minister, Youth Minister, Lay Associate Pastor, Music Minister, Church Neighbours' Pastor, Prayer Coordinator and Church Visitor.

Preaching programme

Some years back we did a fairly in-depth survey of the community and discovered that around 75% of the people in our community were not members of any club or programme within the community. Side by side with that, it also became clear that 75% of those who attend church do so only on Sunday morning and are reluctant to be involved in any other aspect of the life of the church. Consequently, it became obvious that the preaching programme for Sunday morning was crucial to help busy Christians be witnesses during the week, wherever they found themselves to be active.

Therefore, we now use expository preaching through whole books of the Bible. My preaching programme is published three months in advance with the title and passage and that appears on our quarterly Worship Schedule, which is in the hands of all those participating in any way in the leadership of that worship.

In establishing this kind of ministry, we discovered that it was crucial that people were encouraged to trust one another enough to make mistakes. Second, we spent considerable time communicating this vision to the wider church and, as I did that, I found it very helpful to be able to get supportive material from within General Assembly Reports that I was able to use both as preaching illustrations and within my pastoral letter in the quarterly Church Magazine. We also set about a scheme of seeking to identify the gifts, talents and interests of the varied members of the congregation, so that today upward of 200 of our members are active in various areas of specific ministries, and that across a very wide age range.

What difference has it made?

Output into full time Christian work

Slowly, others took note of our structures and we received an increasing number of invitations to share with other

congregations, Presbytery conferences and various conferences throughout the land. As people were given opportunity to use their gifts in ministry, we then discovered a growing number of our members being called into areas of full-time ministry. Over the years we have seen some twenty-five members, including spouses, called to ministry and, at present, they do so in three countries. Seven of our members were called to overseas ministry in a variety of nations and, at present, we support over forty missionaries in four continents within nineteen countries.

Some have asked whether this has been done with an influx of new people with new vision and new energy. We certainly have had new people but the basis of this whole ministry was, and still is, very much rooted in the traditional congregation, 70% of whom live within the parish with another 18% in the contiguous parishes. Six of our present conveners were part of the church family when I arrived as well of five of our current ministers. Worship has been immeasurably enriched, and the leadership of others has challenged me to change my own style of leadership when I do lead. Each Sunday it is enormously encouragingly to hear my family and myself prayed for publicly.

Widening scope of team ministry

We have developed a team who share in school chaplaincy work with me as well as hospital visitation. My pastoral associates and assistants participate in bereavement work, post hospital visiting and, from time to time, lead funeral services in my absence. We have little difficulty in responding to invitations to lead worship occasionally in some of the Homes for the Elderly in our city. Monthly worship is conducted in a Sheltered Housing complex and in a Nursing Home in the parish.

I myself have been released for a much wider ministry stretching from Presbytery responsibilities to involvement in a worldwide committee. Recently the Kirk Session and congregation offered their support in encouraging me to embark on a post-

It has been hard work and has involved, both for myself and also for the wider congregation, a great deal of faith — and indeed, risk

graduate degree leading hopefully to a Doctor of Ministry. This is to reflect on and enrich our practical ministry together.

Are there any problems?

First of all, this kind of congregational life demands involvement. It is hard to be anonymous and we have had people coming to worship with us, I suspect, fully with the intention of committing themselves to the life of the congregation, only to realise that that membership with us would be more demanding than they were willing for and so they slip away.

Mistakes

We have made genuine mistakes in selecting people to be part of the worship leadership on occasions. However, within the constitution of the Church of Scotland, since that is my responsibility then I do take the blame and I see it as my place to offer my apologies to those who feel somewhat embarrassed by these slip-ups. From time to time we have faced significant financial challenges and at such times it has been extremely easy to point the finger at the Minister (shades of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt).

However, these problems have to be faced head-on and people brought to realise the implications and indeed the facts. For example at one point, analysing my own diary, I was able to respond to this kind of criticism with evidence that I had had pastoral contact, one to one, with over 60% of my congregation in the previous year and worked in the parish just under sixty hours a week. In other words, I may be often away but I am more often at home.

Sometimes, the Presbytery Quinquennial Visitation Teams³ have found us a little bit enigmatic in that they came with set questions and set structures into which they expect all congregations to fit. Having said that we have received excellent support from the Presbytery although, from time to time, some of my colleagues have looked somewhat strangely at us from a safe distance. We had an outstanding Quinquennial Report from the Presbytery of Aberdeen last year.

There have been and continue to be teething problems with the Church Neighbour Scheme but then that really is no different to what it was when Elders were responsible for districts. We realise that we are changing against a long tradition and it has to be done with sensitivity, with prayer and with as much communication as is possible to encourage confidence in the congregation and, often nervous Christians to a deeper involvement.

For my own part I have realised last year, on a visit to a church in the United States, that I have basically assumed, particularly for new people coming into the life of the congregation, that it has been a simple matter to understand our structures. This has caused some confusion. We are, therefore, revisiting every couple of years what we do and why we do it, so that we renew our own understanding, challenge our own prejudices and seek God's fresh word for us as we travel with Him.

Conclusion

It has been hard work and has involved, both for myself and also for the wider congregation, a great deal of faith — and indeed, risk. Looking to God and trusting in Him, we have had to learn in a

more practical way to trust one another and this we are still learning to do, but with our mistakes. We have a God who forgives us; we have a church family that is learning to appreciate different personalities as well as different gifts.

Myself the greatest problem!

We have our misunderstandings and I sense in it all, that this minister whom Newhills Church called twenty-four years ago is really the greatest problem in the whole endeavour! God has had to do a massive job of work in my own heart to release the ministry to him first, so that he may indeed share it with the wider congregation. It is not mine to share by Christ's to give. That work in my life continues.

We are still learning, still moving, still looking to God and still praying that he will pour out his Spirit upon us that we may yet see the parish and community in which he has set us, ablaze with the Name of Jesus and the Love of God. That is still not the case. Please God there are those who will still be around to see it as a living reality.

- 1 The only ruling body in the congregation is a Kirk Session, there being no deacons or other financial committee.
- 2 A 'Reader' is someone authorised by the local Presbytery to conduct public worship and preach.
- 3 A five yearly visit by a delegation from the local Presbytery to enquire in the state of a congregation's life and witness.

...through the foolishness of preaching...

by David Randall, Macduff

A Review Article on Jolyon Mitchell's *Visually Speaking*¹

It is not often that one hears a television presenter express the view that the spoken word is the simplest and most powerful means of communication that we have. My ears pricked up; the speaker was David Dimbleby, and he was introducing the 1998 Richard Dimbleby Lecture.

He described the occasion as '...a rare and refreshing television event — for someone to be invited simply to talk — without illustration, without film, without computer graphics'. He went on, 'Everyone in what is now rather depressingly known as the communications industry is obsessed at the moment with the new technologies — with the digital delivery of information, with e-mail, with the CD-rom and with the vast wastes of the internet'. And then came these words with which I opened this review article, 'The spoken word remains the simplest and the most powerful means of communication that we have, and this lecture pays tribute to it'.

So does the book under review here. The author writes as a radio producer, a preacher and a lecturer in communication and theology. As David Dimbleby described the lecture as a refreshing

event, so I would describe this book as a refreshing book; it provides stimulus for preachers who want to preach better sermons.

A refreshing book

To begin with, it is refreshing to find that the author believes in preaching. He does not capitulate to the idea that we must all abandon purely verbal communication and move to an 'everything must be visual' approach. 'I do not agree with those who argue that the rapid development, expansion and convergence of communication technologies means that preaching has become an anachronistic form of communication'.² For those who find their mandate in the calling of One whose word speaks of people being saved through the foolishness of preaching (1 Cor. 1:21), this emphasis is a refreshing one.

It is also refreshing to find that the author warns preachers against 'the seductive temptation of translating their messages to fit the Zeitgeist or the ruling ideologies of their age'.³ He draws a clear distinction between 'translation and modification, contemporary clarification and faint-hearted reductionism'.⁴ This too can only be refreshing for those who believe that our calling is to declare today the faith once for all given to the saints (Jude 3).

David Dimbleby's introduction went on, 'There's a danger in our excitement to embrace these new ways of communication that we'll push what is communicated into second place.' The book under review avoids that mistake.

The challenge for preachers

Visually Speaking is also a challenging book for all who have the privilege and responsibility of standing in a pulpit or in any way proclaiming the Word of God. The book is not so much about the call to preach, or the message which is to be preached; its challenge concerns the way in which we preach that Word. We are urged to be aware of what is going on in the world of communication, to be aware of trends in the media and to learn how to be more effective oral communicators.

It is a book which helps us to be more reflective about our preaching, more imaginative in our preparation and more 'interesting' in how we seek to communicate God's truth. In a small pre-service prayer meeting, one lady in my congregation used to pray weekly that the Lord would enable me to 'make the congregation interested'. I used to think it wasn't a very lofty petition; but, on the other hand, if I don't interest the listeners, I won't do anything else for them (and people today are used to having remote control buttons!).

How awful, and how much to be dreaded, would it be to be very biblical, very orthodox — and very boring! It is not enough to take refuge in a text such as the one quoted ('it has pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe') and pay no attention to matters of communicative technique and style. To apply a visual metaphor to our oral communication, do we preach in colour, or are we still operating in black and white?

The book is not so much about the call to preach, or the message which is to be preached; its challenge concerns the way in which we preach that Word

If it is true that men and women (and especially young people) are 'being turned away from Christ and His Church by dull, unarresting, unedifying and aimless preaching'⁵ and if it is true that we have 'a colossal task on our hands if we hope to counteract the baneful tendencies of much modern television',⁶ then it stands to reason that we who preach must be constantly seeking, under God's guidance, to become better preachers.

The basic theme of *Visually Speaking* is: 'How do you communicate orally and effectively in a society where a whole range of audio-visual stimuli competes for your congregation or audience's attention?'⁷

Learning from radio

In pursuing this issue, Mitchell looks at communication in several fields, but it is radio that is his principal concern; the very first words of the book are, 'What can preachers learn from radio broadcasters, and in particular from religious radio broadcasters?'⁸ He concedes that television and film have played a considerable part in shaping today's communicative environment, and comments, 'While writers in homiletics are at last beginning to take increasing note of these two media, they have largely overlooked the significant contribution of radio'. In expounding his belief that 'aspects of the theory and practice of radio broadcasting have much to offer preachers',⁹ Dr Mitchell helps to redress the balance.

Much of the book consists of detailed analysis of particular broadcasters: Ronald Selby Wright, C.S. Lewis, Angela Tilby, Lionel Blue and some American radio preachers, variously described in such vivid terms as 'The Singing Radio Preacher', 'The Athletic Radio Preacher' and 'The Blowing Radio Preachers'.

Once it may have looked as if television would destroy radio: 'Over and over again... reports of radio's death have proven premature... Far from shrivelling from the media scene, there is no medium more ubiquitous than radio, no source of information, entertainment, music, sports, weather and business news more pervasive in people's lives'.¹⁰

But one of the points made is that, whereas speakers on radio could once envisage themselves as speaking to groups of people (e.g. gathered round the kitchen table), they now need to see themselves generally as addressing one person (in the car, through a walkman, etc.) Radio speech has become an intimate form of speech; it is claimed that Selby Wright was a radio success because he recognised this distinction long ago: 'In an era when many of the best-known voices on the radio treated the microphone like a public meeting, he grasped intuitively that it could be used to say intimate things in a very personal way'.¹¹ Similarly, it is suggested, Rabbi Lionel Blue gives the impression of being not a preacher but just someone who wants a word or two with you.

Mitchell suggests that listeners have become accustomed to an intimate form of public speaking and that they will therefore resist being 'spoken at' or 'spoken down to' by preachers,¹² and he points out that many writers in homiletics are keen to move away from the image of the preacher as a herald.

Yet, what if there is biblical warrant for the view of the preacher as one who is there to proclaim (not just chat about) the Word of the Lord? Does such an 'authority' sit well with a conversational style? Is there a form of speaking which expresses authority (not the authority of the speaker, but the authority of the message which he is commissioned to proclaim on behalf of Another) in a 'user-friendly' style? It is one of the issues raised by this book: is there a way of combining the immediacy of a conversational style with the sense of speaking with divine authority ('Thus says the Lord')?

Over recent years, public address systems have delivered preachers from the need to 'speak up' in order to be heard.

But the question might be posed: should the voice be adjusted to the PA system, or should the PA system be adjusted to the voice? 'Wright and Lewis often maintained a sense of distance from their audience, at times sounding over-confident, authoritative or even magisterial in their broadcast talk. This marks a sharp contrast with the work of many contemporary broadcasters.'¹³ Much modern speaking on radio and television might indeed be described as 'prattle' and certainly very different from the carefully measured speech of a C.S. Lewis, or from the carefully prepared, edited and re-edited work which Dr Mitchell advocates.

In one place, Dr Mitchell asserts, 'To return to a proclamatory style of preaching is to invite a communication breakdown'. However, we also find the expression, 'declamatory forms of presentation',¹⁴ and perhaps more attention might have been given to the difference between genuine proclamation (proclamation of what is, after all, not our own message) and the declamatory style which seems to boom down from on high. Surely it is possible to combine a proclamatory style with a kind of intimacy, especially in a settled ministry where a relationship is built up between the preacher and the listeners.

Appealing to all the senses

One of the principal theses of *Visually Speaking* is that we need to learn to speak in such a way that we appeal not only to the sense of hearing but to the other senses also. It is important, Mitchell argues, to engage 'the total imagination, which involves not only hearing and sight, but also smell, taste and touch. This is a way of speaking which appeals multisensorially to the entire person, not simply to the intellect. It can therefore assist in the translation of written biblical texts into oral forms that will engage listeners successfully'.¹⁵ This may involve such techniques as a multi-camera approach (eg seeing the story of the good Samaritan from different angles) and a dialogue style. 'The dialogical nature is that you are for ever hearing what people are hearing, and you're thinking, "As I say this what will people be saying?"

And so your next paragraph has to deal with their "Yes, but". A dialogue is where you are, in your imagination, in dialogue with the people.'¹⁶

Dr Mitchell asserts that 'there is a need to develop a re-newed or re-formed language that draws less upon abstract theological concepts, and more upon the art of making pictures with words.'¹⁷ But are theological concepts 'abstract'? Surely, our task is to take the theological truths of Scripture and expound and apply them for today, and this book challenges us to do so in a way that will engage the attention, interest and response of those who listen. My member who prayed regularly that I would be enabled to interest the people was perhaps praying a very significant prayer. How can I preach in such a way that (as in the anecdotal remembrance of one of J.S. Stewart's sermons) you can just hear the wind in the trees as Jesus and Nicodemus converse in John 3, or in such a way that you feel yourself in the storm-tossed boat of Acts 27? In preaching recently about Rahab (Joshua 2), I found myself trying to convey the great sigh of relief when the King of Jericho's soldiers departed and the two spies could come down from their hiding-place in the roof.

So much of the Bible's story is told in highly imaginative and colourful ways that there is little excuse for us making it dull! In his introduction to Revelation, for example, Michael Wilcock writes, 'The truths of Revelation are indeed matters for the mind to grasp; but they are presented to us in a riotous procession of symbols with a panoply of music and colour and texture, and even taste and smell. It is a great thing that one's intellect should be captive to the Word of God. But in how many Christian people has the imagination never yet been harnessed for the service of Christ?'¹⁸

Visually Speaking challenges us to use our God-given imagination in 'connecting' with the people of today.

Listening, picturing, translating, editing

Dr Mitchell draws together the lessons of his book in terms of four verbs: listen, picture, translate, edit. (One of his own points is that we need to use more verbs and nouns and fewer adjectives.)

1. Under 'listen', he lists four areas in which we need to learn to be good listeners:

- we need to listen to the Bible — that must indeed come first;
- we need to listen to the concerns of our hearers — this highlights the value of the preacher also being the pastor, the pastor also being the preacher;
- we need to listen to the musicality of our speech — this concerns our choice of language and our endeavour to speak in a way that gains and holds the attention of those who listen;
- we need to listen to the cultural and communicative context outside our own discursive community; Mitchell's analysis of the American radio preachers finds that they generally speak (in raised voices) only to their own discursive community, with little regard for those outside it.

This contrasts with such a speaker as C.S. Lewis who neither whispered nor shouted. 'Never does he display the vocal antics of the high-powered salesman, the fiery orator, or the impassioned evangelist, but he uses force and emphasis on a conversational level to intensify meanings and to sharpen contrasts.'¹⁹

2. Mitchell's second imperative is 'picture'. He calls for more concrete pictorial language and less of the abstract concept. Readers of this journal may react by saying that we are called to preach doctrine. I was recently recall-

So much of the Bible's story is told in highly imaginative and colourful ways that there is little excuse for us making it dull!

ing James Stewart advising some of us that we should 'go for' the 'big' doctrines right away, avoiding the temptation to leave the big themes for later. But our task is to preach doctrine in a non-theoretical way, to show its relevance to faith and life. One thinks of how Hebrews 11 follows its definition of faith by a long list of examples of such faith in action. And of course there is the profound theological teaching of Jesus given in the simplest of stories!

3. Next we are counselled, 'translate'. Mitchell advocates what he calls a 'dynamic equivalence' model for translating the Bible's message into today's currency: '...if preachers are to be heard today they need to understand the kind of speech which their listeners are accustomed to hearing and they need to develop tools for translating their own discourse into forms which will engage their audience's attention.'²⁰ It is refreshing also to hear the author qualify this point in the words quoted earlier about the distinction between 'translation and modification, contemporary clarification and faint-hearted reductionism'.²¹ We believe in truth unchanged, unchanging, and our calling is to work hard at finding ways in which that unchanging truth can be expressed in terms which will capture the attention of our contemporaries and help them to find the answer to that basic question, 'Is there a word from the Lord?' (Jer. 37:17). How awful it would be if people with such a question in their minds should be bored by us!

4. Dr Mitchell's fourth imperative is 'edit'. He instances the trouble which C.S. Lewis took in writing and re-writing in order to find the best visual analogies to make his points clear (although the point should also be made that a sermon must not sound like a read essay). We are told, 'The gift of spontaneity can all too easily become the curse of self-indulgent meandering'.²² One is reminded of the old story of the person who, when asked how long it would take him to prepare to speak for five minutes asked for a few hours, but when asked how long he would need to prepare to speak for an hour said, 'I'm ready now!' It is widely acknowledged there has always been a strong emphasis on

Our pulpits are not given us for the propagation of our views, and it may be that we need to educate people in how to listen to sermons

preaching in reformed churches but nowadays sermons tend to be shorter and many ministers spend much less time in sermon preparation than once was the case. *Visually Speaking* is a strong counterblast against such a trend. It urges us to take care in our preparation to preach God's word, and I believe it will give readers a sense of excitement in their endeavours.

The listening ear

The author confesses himself 'intrigued by the ways in which speech, radio and preaching interact'.²³ His book draws heavily on research he undertook for his producing of a radio programme ('Garrison Keiller's Radio Preachers'). Indeed there were points at which the present writer felt the book had become a survey of religious broadcasting as such. Nevertheless the whole book does help us to learn from experts in spoken communication.

An illustration he might have given but didn't is the descriptive power of sports commentators; even televised football matches are best watched with the sound turned down and the radio commentary turned on. These commentators illustrate good descriptive qualities, helping the listener (when listening on radio alone) to visualise the action. May we do the same with our preaching of God's word.

He might also have developed his response to the notion that 'there is no compelling reason to try to re-educate hearers to appreciate a popular method of yesterday'.²⁴ It is generally assumed that church attenders know how to listen to sermons, but it isn't necessarily so!

I remember a congratulatory visitor leaving church after a service in which I had preached on a distinctively Christian attitude to the Lord's Day. He

wanted to assure me that he had enjoyed the service very much, and he added, 'And I wholly endorse your views on Sunday!' That might have been short-hand for, 'I wholly agree that your exposition was a true exposition of what Scripture says on the subject'. But I remember feeling that if I had given the impression of preaching my views on the matter, then I had failed miserably. Our pulpits are not given us for the propagation of our views, and it may be that we need to educate people in how to listen to sermons.

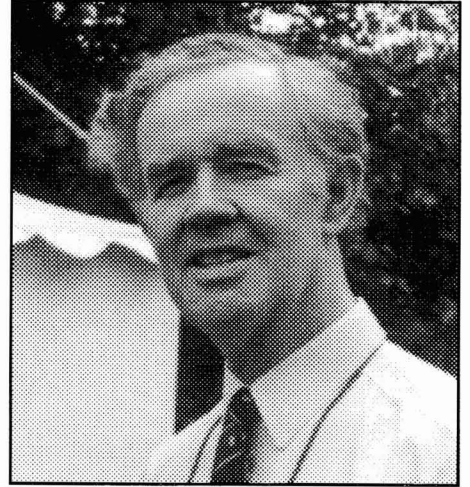
In teaching first communicants, for example, I make the point that a sermon is different from other kinds of speeches they may hear, and that they should seek to learn several things about how to listen:

- the first is that they should open their Bibles and follow the passage;
- the second is that they should follow the text in the spirit of 1 Samuel 3:10, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening';
- thirdly I bring in John 21:22, where Jesus challenged Peter not to consider how the message applied to other people, but to take it to his own heart;
- then there is Acts 17:11, where we find a model of the proper assessment of sermons: 'They received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true';
- lastly, I refer to James 1:22, 'Do not merely listen to the word. Do what it says'.

Visually Speaking is a refreshing and stimulating book. It can help us all in our endeavours to glorify God in the way we use that most simple and powerful means of communication that we have — the spoken word.

Endnotes

- 1 Jolyon Mitchell, *Visually Speaking* (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1999).
 - 2 Mitchell, p.2
 - 3 Mitchell, p.186
 - 4 Mitchell, p.186
 - 5 Jay Adams, *Preaching With Purpose* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1982) p.xi
 - 6 John Stott, *I Believe In Preaching* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1982), p.75
 - 7 Mitchell, p.219
 - 8 Mitchell p.1
 - 9 Mitchell p.5
 - 10 Marilyn Matelski, 'Resilient Radio', in *Radio: The Forgotten Medium*, edited by E.C.Pease & E.E.Dennis, Transaction Publishers, London, 1995) p.5
 - 11 Johnston McKay, broadcast talk, 'The Radio Padre' on BBC Radio 4, 1993
 - 12 Mitchell, p.72
 - 13 Mitchell, p.99
 - 14 Mitchell, p.66
 - 15 Mitchell, p.6
 - 16 James Jones, Interview, 1997
 - 17 Mitchell, p.6
 - 18 M.Wilcock, *I Saw Heaven Opened* (IVP, London). pp.11f.
 - 19 C.Keefe, 'On The Air' in C.S.Lewis, *Speaker and Teacher* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1971), pp.173f.
 - 20 Mitchell, p.187
 - 21 Mitchell, p.186
 - 22 Mitchell, p.232
 - 23 Mitchell, p.1
 - 24 D.C.Norrington, *To Preach Or Not To Preach* (Paternoster, Carlisle, 1996), p.96
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Ann Allen meets David Searle

A long time ago, on a mission to Newhills Parish Church, Aberdeen, I met the minister of that charge, David Searle. Now Warden of Rutherford House, David is a man to whom few can remain indifferent, and for whom many give God thanks. He became a valued friend, instrumental in shaping areas of our lives. For some years now he has been responsible for shaping the ministry of Rutherford House.

Ann: David, you have had ministries in three different parishes, one in rural Aberdeenshire, one in Central Scotland and one in Ulster. How did that varied experience equip you for your work in the House?

David: Looking back, I can see clearly why God in his providence gave me such varied experience. The problems and challenges of the three congregations were very different. They were all at completely different stages and called for significantly individual approaches.

Therefore they were all quite separate learning experiences for me. Much of the substructure of what we are seeking to do at the House is drawn from the lessons I tried to learn in those three congregations.

Ann: What do you see as the main contribution the work of the House makes to the life of the Church?

David: I would want to take that question in two ways. First, the main contribution the House itself makes to the Christian Church I believe to be through the publishing programme, even though it is very modest. I am convinced the pen is mightier than the sword and therefore believe books can have a most strategic ministry. Only eternity will reveal what is accomplished by the printed word. Second, the main contribution my own work makes to the Church I believe to be in the residential courses for ministers together with our preaching

workshops and conferences. Effective ministry is difficult to achieve. It demands blood, sweat and tears and it is the facilitating of fruitful, effective ministry which is my own first love in the House's work.

Ann: Over the last seven years since your appointment what changes have you sought to implement in the emphasis of the work?

David: First of all I should say that I have tried to continue the House's original emphasis on theological research through the Dogmatics Conferences, publishing of doctoral theses and various theological study groups. We have also worked hard to improve study facilities at the House by upgrading the accommodation we can provide and by developing the library. The new emphasis has been in pastoral work among ministers along with the ten modules we now offer to help in the training and

strengthening of the eldership.

Ann: What is your vision for the future? How would you hope to see the work develop and grow in the next decade?

David: That is not an easy question to answer since I am due to retire in less than three years and whoever is appointed to be the next Warden will have to bring his own particular gifts and emphasis to the work. There are, however, three areas of church life which I believe to be of great importance and in which we should be active. First, the encouragement of expository preaching must continue to be a major aspect of the House's role. Second, there must be a far greater emphasis on evangelism in every parish in Scotland. In my view my successor will need to have a deep concern to see congregations engaging in effective outreach. Third, I think far more must be done to encourage some of our ministers to engage in further theological research so that they might then find posts in theological faculties in Scotland. I feel one of the massive weaknesses in our education of ministers is that nearly all our theological educators are professional scholars with no experience of pastoral work, far less of church planting. I would love to see Rutherford House offering substantial scholarships to enable those with several years of preaching and pastoral experience to undertake further study in order to prepare themselves to become involved in training ministers.

Ann: How dependent is that vision on increased financial and prayer support?

David: My own greatest frustration has been having to spread my efforts too widely. I could easily spend all my time (and more) on publishing alone for, as I have already remarked, there are huge opportunities in that field. However, I could also spend all of my time (and more) in working with ministers, church leaders and elders. So far I have only scratched the surface of the needs there. Much of the cause of this frustration has

been the financial restrictions under which we work for we haven't the resources to employ the extra staff needed to exploit the possibilities. Nevertheless, I hasten to add that we are immensely grateful for the financial support that is sacrificially given and with it the prayer support also for usually people who give follow up their gifts with prayer.

Ann: In a world of increasing fragmentation when new evangelical groupings seem to emerge with different agendas and little networking, where does Rutherford House fit in? How do we justify our existence?

David: Although I see the value of parachurch organisations, I have never seen ourselves in that category. We were originally set up by the churches for the churches. We are here to be servants of churches of all denominations. As requests for support, training and help for ministers and elders come in, we simply respond. I find those requests provide all the justification we need for our existence.

Ann: In the overview your travelling around Scotland gives you, what do you see as the main strengths and weaknesses of the evangelical church today?

David: My answer to your question may surprise you. I think our preaching is weak and our evangelism is even weaker. Certainly the preaching of evangelicals is biblical, but it can also be at times very boring, the cardinal sin of any preacher. It doesn't sufficiently engage with contemporary culture, it isn't apologetic enough, and it is generally far too cerebral with not enough imagination, colour and application. As a result the Gospel doesn't make a life-changing impact on church members. The consequence of that is lack of evangelism, since by far the most effective outreach is by believers whose lives overflow with the grace of Christ.

Ann: Given that there are increasing numbers of evangelicals in

ministry why do you think we make so little impact on the church at national level in Scotland?

David: I have to agree with the assumption implicit in your question. I wonder if in the answer there are two sides to the same coin, a negative and a positive. The positive is that evangelicals tend to give highest priority to their parish and congregational work and that leaves them little or no time to be involved in extra-parochial activity. In one way, it is commendable that evangelicals are too engrossed with parish work to step into the corridors of ecclesiastical power. The negative aspect is that too many evangelicals fail to see the strategic necessity of being involved in the influential committees which are responsible for the church's work.

Unfortunately there are two factors which seem to me to militate against much change in the failure of Scottish evangelicals to make significant impact on the national church. The first is the growing centralisation of power in the church. Because some presbyteries have been careless in fulfilling their responsibilities towards the wider church, central committees have taken the opportunity to grasp more and more power, hence the bludgeoning bureaucracy which is increasingly controlling the church. The second factor arises from the crisis in recruitment to the ministry. Parishes are becoming larger as congregations are brought together into ever more cumbersome and unmanageable unions and linkages. Ministers responsible for four or five congregations are unlikely to have a high priority of exerting influence through membership of key committees of the church. They are finding it hard enough to survive without taking on additional demanding administrative work.

Ann: You have had opportunities to minister in Australia, India and Brazil, as well as in Wales and Ireland (both north and south) and Europe. What lessons have you learned from the church in these areas and what has most thrilled and disappointed you?

David: That is almost impossible question to answer in a few sentences. Let me first make a couple of comments on India and Brazil. What thrills me about the church in both of these countries also disappoints me most about the church in Scotland. It is their flexibility, and therefore their readiness to respond imaginatively to changing circumstances and new opportunities. Here in Scotland we are shackled with bureaucracy. We have structures which are cast in concrete. Over the past couple of hundred years the church has exploited to the full the culture which modernity (spawned by the Enlightenment) imposed on our way of life. Now that modernity is vanishing before our eyes and being replaced by a postmodern culture, the church apparently can only rattle the chains of its past bondage to a dying culture, unable to break free and seize the opportunities confronting it. Brazil and India have no such bondage. The comparatively young churches in these countries have no heavy historical traditions binding them hand and foot as we have.

The Presbyterian churches in Australia and Ireland are different to Scotland in that while they both owe their past heritage to Scotland, their theological colleges are essentially orthodox in doctrine and are almost invariably staffed by teachers with backgrounds in parish ministry. They do not therefore have the wide polarisation we find in a so-called broad church such as the Church of Scotland. I am not saying these churches have no problems, but I would say the problems they are grappling with are germane to the work of evangelism and pastoral ministry. In other words, they are concentrating far more obviously on fulfilling the great commission and on building biblical churches.

By contrast the Presbyterian Church of Wales offers 20th century evidence of the tragic consequences of secession by evangelicals from the parent body, both for the majority of those who secede and the church from their secession. I know many would disagree with that last statement, but I also believe many would agree with me.

Ann: If you could give one piece of advice to someone new to ministry what would it be?

David: Love God, love your wife and love your people! Without love, I am nothing!

Ann: And if you were asked to write your own epitaph, we hope not to be used for a long time, what would you want to say?

David: I recall visiting an elderly lady in one of my congregations who had lived through half a dozen different ministries. She was prattling on telling me about different ministers. She said something like this: Next we had the Rev. Mr So-and-so and he was a real man's man, and she told me of his fine bearing and manly character. Then we had the Rev. Mr So-and-so, and he was a real ladies' man, and she related how he would lift his hat and bow when he met any female member of his congregation. Then we had the Rev. Mr So-and-so, and he was nobody's man. She said, 'Nobody liked him'. Suddenly a new thought occurred to her and she said, 'I wonder what you will turn out to be?' I recall in that moment crying out in my heart, 'If I am remembered for anything, Lord, may it be that I was *Your* man!'

Book Reviews

The Single Issue

Al Hsu

IVP, Leicester. 1998, 222pp, £6.99
ISBN 0-85111-194-7

Al Hsu in the preface claims that *The Single Issue* represents sound Biblical thinking and practical relevant advice. His claim is justified; the book is eloquently and lucidly written. Al Hsu, himself a single person, refers to his own narrative and includes an interview with fellow-single, John Stott. The questions that follow each chapter are pertinent in helping the reader to explore his or her own emotional and intellectual attitudes to singleness in the light of the Scriptural teaching.

The author begins by describing the history of Christian singleness which he sees as a pendulum swinging back and forth between two equally unhealthy extremes, elevating in turn, marriage and celibacy. He sees dangers inherent in the current family theology and advocates that the church needs to recover the balance in which married and singles are valued equally, a topic to which he later returns.

Al Hsu goes on to dispel what he sees as a traditional misunderstanding of Paul's concept of singleness as a 'gift'. He also dispels the myth of the 'marital mandate' as a misunderstanding of God's comment that it is aloneness that is not good, not the lack of a spouse. He dispels the fallacy of the 'perfect partner' by reminding us that one of the main causes of marital break-up is the belief that marriages are made in heaven without the need for any maintenance to be done on earth.

Throughout his book Al Hsu stresses the twin concepts of the sovereignty of God and (wo) man's free will. He deals sensitively with the common temptation for singles to feel lonely stressing that singleness does not cause loneliness: it is more often rooted in poor self-esteem compounded by the depersonalising that characterises our modern society. This interpretation brings Al Hsu back to his central theme of knowing one's identity in Christ and

giving Christ top priority in one's life.

The author offers practical advice on the discipline of solitude and its potential to lead to inner fulfilment; in solitude we come to grips with our own humanity and fallenness and ultimately gain in selfunderstanding and in compassion for others. He authenticates his advice with reference to his own experiences in establishing a singles' group within his own church. In a final section, Al Hsu challenges singles to live dynamically for God, confident in the completeness of their identity in Christ. *The Single Issue* has been for this single, both affirming and energising!

Maureen E.J. Bennett, Bangor,
N Ireland

The Way Everlasting — A Study in Psalm 139

E J Young

Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1997.
124pp, £3.50
ISBN 0-85151-731-5

This book was first published in 1965, but the message of the book needs to be heard again today. As the subtitle indicates this book is a commentary on Psalm 139 and he effectively makes a plea for more meditation in our religion.

Psalm 139 is a prayer which exalts the majesty of God. The very theme itself is a subject this age needs to return to if it wants to recover the depth of spirituality of a past generation.

Each chapter is a commentary on each verse of the Psalm, and its meaning is carefully explained. The author is meticulous in his study and his knowledge of the original Hebrew shows through on almost every page. He makes a particularly good job of explaining the imprecations of David towards the end of the psalm and points out: "Were there anything unworthy in David's hatred, he could not and would not appeal to God for corroboration" referring to verse 24 when David says: "Search me, O God and know my heart... and see if there be any wicked way in me"!

The author points out that David does not resent God's close scrutiny of his life, indeed the psalmist finds comfort in it. The psalmist has obviously

been contemplating God's infinite attributes and now concentrates on God's omniscience and omnipresence.

The book is ideal Saturday night reading for preachers to put them in a spiritual frame of mind. Studies from Psalm 139 would be profitable for many congregations at their mid-week meeting.

George I Macaskill, Stornoway

The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics

Stanley J Grenz

Apollos, Leicester, 1997. 379pp.

The Moral Quest comes to us from the Seminary, it is 'an ethics text', 'a statement of theological ethics,' (p.10) hence the sub-title. While this book places before the reader much from the Academy, it is grounded in the community of the Church beyond the confines of the Academy, as is seen in the many helpful illustrations of ethical choices facing Christians drawn from many different walks of life.

Stanley Grenz offers the reader a thorough and at times detailed description of the Christian ethical quest. This work traces the ethical task from the early Greek philosophers, through the biblical authors and early church fathers, into the schoolmen and reformers before presenting the work of modern scholars. There are 48pp. of notes, 17pp. bibliography and 11pp. of indices. For students taking classes in ethics, or for those interested in tracing the roots of modern ethical methods this will prove a useful resource.

As is clear from early in this book Grenz offers us an ethic of love. Taking a step from CS Lewis *The Four Loves* Grenz aims to incorporate all the four loves of a Christian ethic of love which properly reflects, 'the foundation of life...in the triune God. [that] The centre of the ethical life is Jesus Christ...the Holy Spirit, who is God's transforming presence, within the community of those who gather around Christ'. (pp.298f)

This work reflects a careful handling of Scripture, especially the Old Testament, see pp.97-105. In this way the universality of God's call to live in the

way of the *Lord* comes to all peoples and opens up necessary ethical applications of God's Word to the complex moral questions facing Christians and preachers in today's postmodern world.

Gordon Kennedy, New Cumnock

A Hunger For God

John Piper

IVP, Leicester. 1997, 239pp. £7.99

ISBN 085111 193 9

There are more books appearing on the subject of fasting (or at least more chapters in books) but it is still a relatively underdeveloped subject and practice in many Christian circles. Piper who writes very much as a fan of Jonathan Edwards and CS Lewis has written this to excite a hunger for God, a desire to see him given supremacy and a corollary of that, our own joy deepened. Its inward thrust is to help us deal with our own appetites so that hunger for God comes first, and its outward focus is due to his belief that if our inward appetites are focused on God, there will be a proper engagement with the world in all areas including evangelisation, social justice and cultural engagement.

Rather than assume that fasting is a Christian discipline he sets out in chapter one to establish that, and then to set its purpose out clearly (deeper intimacy with God). In chapter four, fasting for the return of Jesus is a crossover chapter, being followed by three on fasting to change history, fasting and the poor, and fasting and abortion (I didn't expect that one either). A short concluding chapter is followed by a long section (27 pages) of quotations from many famous Christians on fasting.

Not as specific and practical as, say, Foster in *Celebration of Discipline* this is a devout and passionate plea to give fasting a key place in our lives and in an outward looking way and not just as a devotional exercise. Such an engaged theology of fasting is a welcome addition to material already available on this subject.

Gordon R Palmer. Edinburgh.

Conduct which Honours God? The question of homosexuality

Simon Vibert

ORTHOS 14: Fellowship of Word and Spirit, 1995, 36pp, £2.50

ISBN 1 874694 03 6

This book is in two parts. In part one, the writer's aim as the title indicates is to explore the kind of behaviour which is honouring to God. The writer believes firmly in the authority of Scripture and its relevancy for today. He does not, however, simply quote the relevant biblical texts. He explores their context and meaning within the framework of God's plan for creation and redemption. He examines the question, "What is natural?" and believes that conduct and behaviour which is honouring to God conforms with God's ordering of creation and with his plan for redemption in Christ. It is in this light that he examines what Paul says, for example, in Romans 1:18ff, etc. When we do not glorify and obey God and conform to his order of creation and plan for redemption, our conduct and our relationships become degraded, homosexuality is practised. When we do love and obey God our conduct is honouring to God and the practice of homosexuality has no place.

In part two, we are presented with an interview between the author and Martin Hallet, director of the True Freedom Trust.

Martin Hallet, "was involved in a homosexual lifestyle for over nine years before Jesus Christ dramatically changed his life". Although transforming him, his conversion did not bring heterosexual feelings. He says "that I have never actually felt that I wanted to have heterosexual feelings". His former lifestyle has ceased. Yet he says, "I do not feel that I am celibate in the sense of incredible self-denial and deprivation, although in essence I must be. . . . Perhaps I should say 'I feel called to be unmarried'"

Part two, as is said in the Foreword, complements "the clear-cut veto on homosexual behaviour" which we have in part one. Here the whole issue is handled understandingly, sensitively, lovingly, pastorally. What is presented is

Book Reviews

challenging and thought provoking.

Although all Christians may not agree with every detail of what is said, this book is a helpful contribution to the present debate and to our understanding of the pastoral issues involved. I recommend it.

David W Torrance, North Berwick

Empowered to Pray

Woodrow Kroll

Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, London, 1996, 142pp. £5.99

ISBN 0 340 65656 5

"This is a book that examines the skillful prayers of Biblical characters" writes the author in his preface. "The great prayers of the Bible reflect people who really knew how to pray. Their prayers show signs of preparation and thought. But they also reflect warmth of heart. Great prayers are on explosive mix of passion and preparation, knowing what to pray for and how to pray."

Mr Kroll divides the content into three parts: preparing to pray, making requests and learning how. These are illustrated from the prayers of Elisha, Nehemiah, Daniel, the Pharisee and the tax collector, Elijah, Jonah, Hezekiah and Jesus. The epilogue brings together conclusions about empowered prayer.

The teaching on prayer is good and basic. For instance, the chapter on Hezekiah strikes a balance between reverence and intimacy, while the account of Daniel's repentant prayer is especially helpful on the seven words or meanings for sin; the step by step examination of the Lord's Prayer is very relevant and practical.

The book's conversational racy style makes it accessible to a new Christian or to someone unused to complex theology. It is well illustrated with stories, points are repeated and the text is broken up into short sections. Each chapter is summarised at the very beginning with the sentence "being empowered to pray means . ." and concludes with a prayer.

The author stresses the importance of praying with information, in an attitude that reflects God's character and

Book reviews

will, and following the pattern of Biblical saints.

Unfortunately, there lingers a nagging unease with the concept that "empowered prayer" comes from "acquiring skills". While there is an emphasis on God's sovereignty and grace, there might also be an impression that prayer can be reduced to a formula guaranteeing an outcome. Thus the very basic nature of the teaching, which is its strength, might also be seen by some to be simplistic.

Fiona Barnard, St Andrews

Pentecost Today

The Biblical Basis for Understanding Revival

Iain H. Murray

Banner of Truth, Edinburgh. 226pp. £9.95

This book will be a strong antidote to much that has been written on revival over the last decade or more.

The book begins with three current views on revival. The first, that the concept of occasional revivals is not biblical at all. As we are living in the age of the Spirit, any idea of revival as a future event is a serious mistake. Murray maintains that this view, 'provides no real biblical understanding for revivals and for that reason it can hardly be said to encourage the expectation of their occurrence.' The second view, prevalent at the beginning of the last century, claimed that revival is conditional upon the obedience and personal holiness of the church. This view wants to make the exceptional the normal and it therefore regards all periods when there is no revival as times in which the Spirit of God is hindered by the church. The third view claims, that although the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost, from that time onwards the work of the Spirit can be viewed in two aspects, the more normal and the extraordinary. The Reformation and the ensuing revivals, give ample proof of the extraordinary aspect. So while Pentecost instituted a new era, the work of Christ in bestow-

ing the Spirit did not end then. It is this third view that Murray argues for throughout the book.

The whole of chapter 2 deals mainly with Charles Grandison Finney's views on revival. In brief, Finney maintained that if Christians followed the right procedures a revival would be inevitable. Sinners are able to do something in order to become Christians, and thus the 'altar call' came into being. Finney justified his theology and methods by pointing to the outstanding results, over against the barrenness of the prevailing orthodoxy. It was at this stage that the word 'revival' lost a lot of its original content and became synonymous with any evangelistic effort and Finney came to be seen as the father of modern day revivalism.

It is from this point that Murray begins to argue from a biblical stance for human responsibility and divine sovereignty in revival. On the place of prayer in revival, Murray writes: 'Prayer is a voluntary Christian activity and an activity which determines results. Yet effectual prayer has a divine source and it achieves the purpose that God Himself intended.' That much prayer has preceded revival is not always supported by evidence. A minister who in the midst of the great Ulster awakening of 1859 wrote: 'Up to the very week of the bursting forth of the revival, there appeared no general desire nor felt need for such a thing.' On the other hand there were times when revivals were preceded by unusual times of prayer. David Brainerd wrote 'I saw how God had called out His people to prayer, and made them wrestle with Him, when he designed to bestow any great mercy on his church.'

Powerful preaching was another aspect of past revivals and this book cites names like Robert Bruce, John Livingston, George Whitefield, John Wesley and others who were obviously anointed instruments of God during revival times. They were well aware of a special unction of the Holy Spirit.

A considerable section of this book deals with the different views on being 'filled with the Spirit', and points to the danger of making Christian experience the basis for a doctrine of the Spirit. To

avoid confusion. 'we have to begin with the Scripture, not with experience. 'We have also to be clear about the work of Christ before we proceed to the Holy Spirit.'

The problem of fanaticism, which has often appeared at a time of revival, is dealt with in depth. Even when a genuine work of God, could at times become beset with excesses that could not be attributed to the work of the Spirit, but to the work of the flesh, or worse still, an attempt by Satan to discredit the Gospel. Although most of the leaders of the earlier revival movements, like Whitefield, Wesley and Robe, spoke against these manifestations, some of the less experienced accepted them as part of the Spirit's activity. The author says little about the recent phenomenon that has been associated with revivals.

The book concludes with 'six things revival will bring' ranging from restoring faith in the word of God to changing the public worship of the churches.

This book has been well researched, has copious footnotes and a good index. A must for any serious student of revivals, and those of us who long to see another outpouring of the Spirit upon our country.

John Ferguson, Isle of Skye